

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

**Title: Thursday, February 12, 1998**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 98/02/12

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

### Bill 3

#### School Amendment Act, 1998

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise and table Bill 3, the School Amendment Act, 1998.

This legislation will help ensure our education system operates effectively by placing a system to ensure a smooth transition between regional divisions, by clarifying the circumstances under which a regional division may become a school division, and finally by clarifying the rules for off-campus education programs.

[Leave granted; Bill 3 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, next Monday, February 16, is Family Day. It's important to table some information on that important day, when we recognize the important contributions that families make to our province. The information bulletin that I am tabling outlines that all of our heritage sites will be free admission that day, which is our practice. We hope families take up this opportunity. Also, the Provincial Museum, which has Earthquest on right now, will be at half price.

Mr. Speaker, we wish all Alberta families a wonderful day on Monday.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table this afternoon copies of a very brief summary from the B.C. Ministry of Health reflecting the success they've had with their very aggressive program to identify those people who received hepatitis C through tainted blood.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make two tablings. The first tabling is a letter dated February 5, 1998, addressed to the Premier by one of my good neighbours down the street, who also happens to be a member of the provincial PC Party, a letter that draws attention to the grave crisis facing the Alberta health care system, especially the emergency wards in Edmonton hospitals.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a front-page story which appeared in the University of Calgary *Gazette* of February 9, 1998, which reports that the tuition increase approved by the board of governors will bring the tuition component to 24 percent

of the U of C's operating costs for '98-99 and raises doubts about the accuracy of the estimate the minister offered in response to my question on February 9, earlier this week.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to table two pages out of the Alberta Treasury Loans and Guarantees Operations Manual, please.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table four copies of the program that was sponsored by the Alberta Congress Board. This program is called the Experienced Older Worker Conference, and this happened December 1 and 2 at the Edmonton Inn here in Edmonton.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'd like to table an agreement by the three House leaders dated February 12, 1998, entitled designated supply subcommittee agreement. The chair would like to remind all members that this agreement is to be read in conjunction with the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, which of course take precedence.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have the distinct honour and pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 12 Scouts from the 197th Scout group in Calgary, which is in the Calgary-McCall area. They are accompanied by their three leaders: Mr. Mark Langlois, Ms Kathy Billington, and Mr. Dave Crough. I request that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Brian Flynn and his children, Sarah and Christopher, who are home schoolers visiting us today from the Millarville area in my constituency. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly His Worship Mayor Doug Faulkner and Councillor Archie Cyprien, who I might add is also chief of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. They are our guests today in Edmonton, and indeed it's a pleasure as a member and former member of the regional council to say that these gentlemen have served the region of Fort McMurray, Wood Buffalo, and Fort Chip tremendously. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them with pleasure to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and to members of the Legislature a young, distinguished, excellent community worker from the town of Vegreville who is seated in the members' gallery: Mr. Peter Dobbie. I ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce through you to the House today an individual who served in the Manitoba Legislature for 24 years: the hon. James Ernst. He has served in many portfolios with the Manitoba government, served with distinction. I would like to introduce him today, have him stand in the members' gallery and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a number of constituents of Edmonton-Glengarry who are here today for question period. They are Gloria Lloyd, Frances Lloyd, Pam Harrison,\* Ian Callum MacNeil, Karen Murray, John McEachern, and Robert Fisher. They are seated in the public gallery, Mr. Speaker, and with your permission I would ask now that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

head: **Oral Question Period**

#### **Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped**

MR. MITCHELL: After years of pressure the government has raised the monthly payment under AISH by – here it is, Mr. Speaker – \$13 a month. That's supposed to stretch between utility increases, food cost increases, rent increases, and the \$2 tax that the government has imposed on each prescription that these people buy. Welfare is kept depressingly low by this government as some kind of perverse incentive to get people back to work. To the Premier: what is the logic of keeping AISH so depressingly low when a criterion for AISH is that you are unable to work?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the assured income for the severely handicapped, I might point out, is probably unique in Canada in terms of a program. In most jurisdictions they don't have a program at all to deal with those who are severely handicapped.

Relative to the level of compensation for those people on AISH, I'll have the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services reply.

1:40

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has raised several points. First of all with respect to the level of AISH, AISH is actually the second highest program for disability in Canada, by a considerable amount I don't mind saying.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are a couple of other things the hon. member must remember. With regard to AISH in Alberta there's no taxation on that rate, whereas in other provinces there is.

Mr. Speaker, the other issue is that the hon. member has again misled the Assembly about the \$2 taxation rate.

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

DR. OBERG: What we did back in November of this year is add a \$2 co-payment on the price of prescriptions for people on AISH.

In order to allow for that, we added an extra \$5 per month so that they would pay for it. For the first three prescriptions per month the AISH recipient is expected to pay \$2 per prescription. After that, Mr. Speaker, the department pays the whole shot.

MR. MITCHELL: They're inspired by having the lowest taxes in the country. Why don't they bother to have the highest AISH in the country, Mr. Speaker?

Why, Mr. Speaker, does the government add insult to injury by taking away the CPP disability benefits the federal government tries to give these people to make their quality of life just a little bit better?

I asked the Premier, Lyle.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear him ask me, but I'll ask the hon. minister to reply.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What happens with the AISH program is that as the CPP benefits from the federal government are paid to the recipient of AISH, AISH is decreased the amount of the CPP contributions. What this enables is a level at \$823 for everyone on AISH, whether or not you receive CPP.

MR. MITCHELL: I'm directing this to the Premier. Why is it that this government's policy is to keep AISH recipients living below the poverty line – below the poverty line, Mr. Speaker – without the dignity and the decency that this society can afford to give them?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, once again, as the hon. minister has pointed out, this program is somewhat unique in Canada and, in terms of what other provinces are doing, is very generous indeed. Quite contrary to what the leader of the Liberal opposition says, the program is in place to allow those people on AISH dignity and quality of life.

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

#### **Energy and Utilities Board**

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my questions are directed to the Minister of Energy. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board has proven to be a model of a quasi-judicial regulatory agency, and well-deserved. The news that the Minister of Energy is contemplating the integration of the administration functions of this agency, the EUB, into the Department of Energy and saving \$10 million in the process is surprising given that the EUB has never, ever been busier. The energy industry needs the assurance of this minister that the integration scheme that he's about to install does not affect the effectiveness, the autonomy, and certainly the independence of the EUB. Sir, why are you about to reduce the operations of the EUB when last April in this House you presented the estimates to increase the number of staff of the EUB by some 10 percent. Which is it?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, in my service to the public of Alberta everything I do is in the public interest. Therefore, any administrative efficiencies between the EUB and the Department of Energy that can be achieved will be achieved. Administrative efficiencies, not to touch their quasi-judicial nature or the public interest they serve.

\*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, the question was not the efficiency. The question quite frankly is: will the minister assure the industry and how can he assure the industry that the independence of the agency is maintained?

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, the industry will be quite pleased with that answer, I'm sure.

How much, sir, is the Arlington Consulting Group being paid to examine this integration of corporate services, and will you release the figures and the report itself?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the report hasn't come through yet, but with the transparency of this government in public accounts and in the budgetary manner, I'm sure that that will come forward. The answer to that is yes. During the estimates of Energy I would ensure that this hon. member will be there that night so that we can certainly go through this in depth.

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

#### **Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc.**

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government reports that for any of its outstanding loans the strategy is to monitor and pursue exit options that maximize the potential return to the province. Earlier I tabled excerpts from the Treasury's loans and guarantees procedures manual that outlines a monitoring process for these loans. The manual reveals that Alberta Treasury must prepare annual and interim financial analysis reports on these loans. My question is to the Premier. What criteria did the government use in their interim analysis recommending that the value of the Al-Pac loan be set at \$260 million rather than the \$390 million book value?

MR. KLEIN: Well, it probably has something to do with the price of pulp, Mr. Speaker. I'll take that question under notice and consult with the Provincial Treasurer.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the process that was outlined in the manual, what value did the government provide in their interim financial analysis regarding the option of holding the Al-Pac loan to full maturity? In other words, what was its present value according to your calculations?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'll have to take that question under notice and consult with the Provincial Treasurer.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier agree to release the reports of Treasury on the value of this loan?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't see any problems with that, Mr. Speaker. We've always been open and transparent. Relative to loans and any of our financial dealings, we've always made a practice of making those documents open and available to the opposition and the public.

THE SPEAKER: ND opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, then followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

#### **Public Service Salaries**

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A tentative master agreement between this government and its employees was reached on February 4 and is now in the process of being voted on. One of the five locals that has yet to reach a subsidiary agreement on a pay raise is local 1, which represents mainly clerical and administrative support personnel. My question is to the minister responsible for personnel administration. Given that the median full-time wage for the 8,000 members of local 1, a sizable majority of whom also happen to be women, is about \$25,000 a year with many making as little as \$18,000 and given that their salaries were frozen in 1991 and then rolled back 5 percent in 1994, does the minister agree that these lowest paid workers in the public service require special consideration when making salary adjustments, and if not, why not?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a system of collective bargaining that's not only under the legislation but certainly is recognized by everyone. AUPE is the recognized collective bargaining agent for our employees, including the people that you've mentioned in local 1. It's a responsibility of that bargaining unit to bring forward its demands to the table. We have a right as well to put our demands on the table. The process is just working itself out as it should.

**1:50**

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that members of local 1 are seeking a pay scale adjustment that would add 3 percent to their salaries and given that many other provincial and federal governments have already done this, why wouldn't the minister proceed to concede to the request of this local?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, we have a process that's in place. Demands were put forward by the union that's involved affecting these employees. Our people on the part of the personnel administration office are trying to respond as best we can within the bargaining environment. I think that negotiations have been going particularly well, and while, as you mentioned, they currently are out for ratification, we hope that we'll see a successful conclusion to all of this so that these folks along with everybody else can start receiving their increased pay.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, given that much higher levels of job skills are required to do administrative support work today than previously and given that these workers are required to have expertise in such areas as information technology, database management, accounting, and desktop publishing, why is the minister refusing to give them the 3 percent increase that they're asking for?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again it's not a matter of refusal; it's a matter of collective bargaining. I might add though, in the interests of the member and the other people here in the House, that a collective bargaining agreement is not a static item. There's going to be a period in time where there is an agreement reached between the two parties, and then of course there's going to be a time frame that that will cover.

One of the things that we're very proud of in PAO here in this province is that we just don't then wash our hands of the whole situation until it's the next time to bargain. I think the points that you have raised in terms of the occupational skills that are required are legitimate concerns, and during the life of a collec-

tive agreement both parties work together to establish that the classification system they had in place at the last bargaining agreement is proper leading into the next round or is something that has to evolve with what's actually happening in the real world.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

### Intensive Livestock Operations

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Tuesday's question period the hon. Member for Little Bow questioned the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on the effect intensive livestock operations are having on water quality in the province, as well as the current code of practice for livestock operations. Although the minister addressed municipal water supplies as well as surface water concerns, he did not comment on groundwater quality, which is the main source of water for most rural Albertans. My first question to the minister: is the groundwater in Alberta safe?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Generally speaking, in the samples that were taken across Alberta, groundwater is safe. However, we have always suggested to anybody drilling a new well that they do test the water before they consume it. Of the 448 samples that were done in deep wells, 2 percent had some fecal counts – and remember, I said it's zero percent tolerance – and in nitrates it's 0.6 percent, a small amount. When it came to shallow wells, about 13 percent had some fecal coliform and about 13 percent in nitrates.

MR. MARZ: My first supplementary to the same minister is: was the source of those fecal counts and nitrates been determined?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, one of the things we found in doing the tests, especially on the shallow wells, is that there was a failure of the cribbing. Some of that cribbing was old and had allowed seepage. There are also some problems with septic tanks being placed too close to the supply of water and in many areas outside the code. People just don't know the code and have placed these septic tanks. Thirdly, yes, there are a number of situations where farmers have been watering their livestock in troughs too close to a shallow well, and of course we know what happens during spring thaw.

MR. MARZ: Thank you. To the same minister my last supplementary: is it the intention of the minister to enforce the code of practice, and if so, would it be in the same manner as the building and electrical codes, which you compared it to on Tuesday?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we have an excellent partnership with local municipalities, and I would hate to preclude the discussion document that will be forwarded to all of the stakeholders. However, I would envision that the municipalities would want to co-operate with us since they are the eyes, the noses, and the ears out there for us. The local agriculture service board staff are on the road every day, so are the locally elected officials, and they will be able to identify those areas of concern to the Department of Agriculture, to the Department of the Environment, and also to the Department of Health.

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

### Hepatitis-tainted Blood

MR. DICKSON: More than a year ago our Minister of Health told us that Alberta would not follow the British Columbia model of a trace-back program to determine who contracted hepatitis C through tainted blood. In Alberta the minister advised that we would just do some general advertising to invite those who received blood prior to May of 1990 to get tested for hep C. In fact, British Columbia has found as a result of their trace-back program that the number of those testing positive for hep C was significantly greater than the 2 percent the authorities originally anticipated. My question would be to the Minister of Health this afternoon. In light of the British Columbia experience will this minister commit to a more aggressive trace-back program so that every Albertan, not just some but every Albertan, who received tainted blood can be identified and treated promptly?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, on this important matter the provinces and territorial governments across Canada have adopted different approaches in terms of publicizing information and making it very possible and widely publicized that there is this issue and that individuals should be seeking information, contacting their doctors, coming forth with respect to the overall matter. It is certainly an important matter, one that we will be discussing as ministers federally and provincially and territorially in the next few days. We have certainly taken the initiative and made a provincewide news release. We have placed the advice out there to the public of this province, and that is the approach that we've taken.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, following up the minister's observation of provinces working together, what will this minister do differently in response to Mr. Justice Krever's observation that government officials appear to have been more concerned about preventing public questioning about the safety of the blood system and deflecting controversy than about informing persons who might be infected?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister has certainly not avoided questions on the issue, and I'm sure all other provincial ministers across Canada and the federal minister realize that this is a very important issue, one that we have to examine very carefully both in terms of the patients' or individual's needs and the recommendations of Justice Krever. We are working our way methodically through that. It is a very important item.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my final question would be this: to clear up the confusion that seems to exist between victims' groups and Mr. Garth Norris of Alberta Health, will the minister tell us which specific advocacy groups he has met with on this issue since the beginning of 1997 and the dates of those meetings?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think I've been quite clear, and that is that I have not met with any of the advocacy groups.

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

2:00

### Alternative Medical Practices

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are about alternative therapies and are to the Minister of Health. Can the minister tell us: since Bill 209 came into force, how many physicians in Alberta have been approved by the college to practise complementary therapies?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there have been seven physicians approved for the offering of complementary therapies in the areas of, as I recall, chelation therapy, herbal medicine, and Reiki. There are a number of other applications in process before the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister of Health also advise this House what the intent of the physicians' achievement review program is, related to concerns that this program will be used to harass physicians who are currently practising complementary medicines?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to indicate that the advocates of alternative medicine that I have met with certainly want to be assured that the practitioners offering complementary therapy are properly qualified in that particular area of therapy. Therefore I think the College of Physicians and Surgeons has an important role to play following Bill 209.

Now, with respect to this worry that, yes, is out there with certain individuals and certain groups about the proposed PAR program, I think, Mr. Speaker, that there is no risk to complementary therapy with respect to this program. It is I think a much-needed program for the medical profession of this province. They have indicated to us that it is. It is one of our most important professions, yet at this point in time it does not have a regular process of performance review, and this is what they want to implement through the PAR program.

I'd like to just add one other thing, Mr. Speaker, and that is that one of the features of the PAR program will be that the review panel, which does this review of a physician's practice every five years, will have someone on the panel who is familiar with the particular specialty or type of practice that the physician is offering.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are Alberta's criteria similar to that of Saskatchewan, whose College of Physicians and Surgeons has approved a number of physicians to practise complementary or alternative therapies?

MR. JONSON: It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that in Saskatchewan the criteria are very parallel or very similar to what has been developed here. They were, true, somewhat ahead of us with respect to moving into this area, but the thing that I would like to point out about Saskatchewan, as I understand it, is that the only complementary therapy that they have made changes to authorize is chelation therapy, whereas in Alberta we have an overall approach following Bill 209 to authorize many types of alternative therapies.

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

#### **Parks and Recreation Areas**

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this parks and recreation privatization process is a mess. Parks are simply not economical to operate as private ventures unless their character is radically altered. Even municipalities are saying this. As the Minister of Environmental Protection has bowed to public pressure in the case of Sylvan Lake and reversed his decision to privatize it, will he now commit that this site will be operated in the same way as a natural heritage site?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, there never was a decision that we were going to privatize the Sylvan Lake park. As a matter of fact, all over the province we know that the day-use areas are very difficult, and as far as getting in facility operators, which is what we're doing, not privatizing or selling, it is difficult, because the ability for an operator to generate revenue is very limited. We are not prepared to institute a charge in a day-use area.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will the minister reverse his decision to privatize the operation of other sites such as Moonshine Lake provincial park, which is in exactly the same situation as Sylvan Lake was?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, they are not exactly the same. As a matter of fact, where there are day-use areas, all over the province, we are looking at how we can co-operate and partner with municipalities, in some cases industry. If there's a major industry that's close, they are partnering with us to operate those day-use areas.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, then does the minister agree that for private operators to make a profit in these parks, they're going to have to radically alter the nature of the park itself? [interjection]

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the member sitting immediately to the hon. member's right has been chattering so much that she has not been able to hear my answer. The fact is that I have said before that we are partnering with municipalities in these day-use areas.

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

#### **Prostate Cancer Treatment**

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and relate to an important issue on men's health. A constituent of mine approached me recently regarding a treatment for prostate cancer that involves the use of cryosurgery. He explained to me that cryosurgery is available in Ontario on a user-pay basis but is not offered in Alberta. Could the minister advise us as to when this treatment will be available to Albertans in Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, cryosurgery is a treatment which is available in Alberta for some conditions, such as cervical cancer. However, it has not been approved or accepted in Alberta with respect to the treatment of prostate cancer as yet. There are criteria that treatments have to pass in terms of being authorized on a general basis. There is research going on with respect to the viability, the safety of this particular treatment for prostate cancer, but as yet it is not authorized generally for that purpose.

MR. STEVENS: My last question also to the Minister of Health is: could you please elaborate on what the nature of that research that is currently being conducted is?

MR. JONSON: The Alberta Cancer Board, Mr. Speaker, through the Tom Baker clinic is conducting research in this particular area. They are working with patients who are willing to be part of this overall research program. I'm hopeful that the proper

criteria will be met as soon as possible, but research, as we all know, needs to be thorough, and it may be some months or perhaps over a year before this process is complete.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

### **Parks and Recreation Areas**

*(continued)*

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Privatization could drastically alter the character of nearly half of our provincial parks and most of our recreation areas in this province. Even worse, where no municipal or private operator comes forward, sites will be offered to groups for their exclusive use or completely closed off, a real loss for Albertans and certainly for our tourism industry. My questions are to the Minister of Environmental Protection. Would the minister give all Albertans a say, just a chance, an opportunity to at least speak out on this privatization? You haven't given them that opportunity.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, some 92 percent of the facilities within the province have been operated by either a contractor or a facility operator. As far as vastly altering the parks system in Alberta, 97 percent of the land base is going to continue to be operated by the department. So as far as the great alteration, no.

The sites that are at risk are basically these small recreation sites that are along highways, and we are having some difficulty with some of them. There's the odd one, yes, where rather than completely closing it, we're allowing a private group like the Boy Scouts, like were here today – they may have the ability to use it privately.

**2:10**

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. My second supplemental: would the minister stop plans that will end up closing sites or giving groups exclusive use when no private operators can be found?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the number of sites that are being looked at for closure this year is minimal. As a matter of fact, in the northwest there were some 35 sites where we did not get a person to put in a proposal. That was on the first round. Today we're down to one site.

MRS. SOETAERT: There are 30 parks and over a hundred other sites.

Will the minister at least ensure that no long-term exclusive rights to our parks and recreation areas are granted so that they can be opened up to the public again when we have a government that believes in keeping our public parks open to the public?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, once again they are totally confused in the verbiage. We're not talking about parks. They are talking about recreation areas, and there's a vast difference. I don't know what it is that they've got against Girl Guides and Boy Scouts.

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

### **Westaim Technologies Inc.**

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the Westaim

corporation produces coin blanks at its facility in Fort Saskatchewan. Apparently the federal government is seeking to build a facility in Winnipeg using \$30 million of taxpayers' money to go into direct competition with this facility in Fort Saskatchewan. My question is to the Minister of Economic Development. I'm wondering if she's able to intervene in any way so this taxpayer-funded, unfair competition will not negatively impact 110 workers in Fort Saskatchewan?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, this is a very troubling story that has been coming about for a number of months now, and clearly I think it's timely that the hon. member raise the issue in this Legislature. I'll just give a quick little background. For 35 years Westaim corporation has been supplying the coinage slugs to the Canadian mint to produce not only Canadian coins but coins for other countries. This has been a very successful commercial relationship between a private corporation and a Crown corporation of the federal government.

Now we have been informed that a Crown corporation of the federal government is contemplating building a facility worth over \$30 million in Winnipeg to go into direct competition with a supplier that they've used for 35 years, a Canadian company. It is unconscionable that a government would try to enter into that kind of competitive mode or even into business at all when there is a facility already in place that is producing the product that is needed by the Crown corporation.

So what can we do about it? Well, we are in contact with officials in the federal government to ask them if in fact they realize that a Crown corporation is doing this, and clearly we are in contact with the Industry people from the federal government asking them to rethink this position, because governments do not belong in business.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, in light of the minister's undertaking, I have no further questions. Thank you.

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

### **Domestic Violence**

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Domestic abuse is a problem on many reserves in Alberta. In a criminal sentencing last year Judge Reilly indicated that he had been told by Stoney people that victims of domestic violence are afraid to testify, because even if the offender is convicted and imprisoned, the victim will be harassed and punished by the offender's family and on the reserve she will be without protection. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. What steps does your department take to ensure that the victim and other witnesses of domestic violence will be protected from retaliation if they testify?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we regard domestic violence as a very serious issue. In fact, hopefully in the next week or two we will be tabling legislation in that regard.

We've been trying to undertake a number of steps recently in light of some very tragic incidents, in particular one that happened, for example, in Edmonton. It was a recent fatal domestic violence case which tended to refocus the public's attention on the bail issue. What we've asked for there is reviewing the bail practices in domestic violence cases. That review is presently ongoing, and we expect results in the near future.

We are developing new guidelines for Crown prosecutors

regarding bail, and in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, sometime ago at a federal/provincial Justice ministers' meeting, we asked for two changes to the Criminal Code. One would be to impose reverse onus on bail with respect to domestic violence cases, and the second was to establish a clear right of appeal from a Queen's Bench justice's bail review with respect to a bail decision. Right now we can only appeal on the basis of either a material change in circumstance or error in law. So we see that initiative itself hopefully offering some protection to the victims with respect to them appearing in court and responding to this issue.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about issues involving many of the reserves in Alberta.

If a witness to domestic assault on a reserve fails to show up for trial, what steps does your department take to determine the reasons why that witness did not attend?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, whether we're talking about domestic assaults on reserves or off reserves, this government treats domestic assault seriously. So as far as I'm concerned, that is a nonissue.

The Crown prosecutors are instructed to ensure that they get all the information they possibly can from victims, and in the event that a victim does not appear before the courts, there may well be a determination that there is a stay in proceedings unless and until they can convince the victim to come forward and give evidence. Basically, it's up to the Crown prosecutors at the local level to make a determination as to whether they should proceed with the case or not proceed and how best to get that victim to give evidence.

MS OLSEN: My third and final question to the same minister: will the minister start keeping statistics on the number of domestic assault trials on reserves which do not proceed because of lack of witnesses?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, off the top I don't have a problem with doing that. I'll certainly take that under advisement and review it with department officials.

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

### **Child and Family Services**

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Our young people must be our top priority" was stated in the Speech from the Throne. As many people know, the child and family services regional authorities have been established. They have been working hard to complete their business plans. The person who has been overseeing the change in Alberta child and family services is leaving his position, creating a vacuum in the implementation plan. I'm referring to Mr. John Lackey, the commissioner of services for children and families. I would like to address a question to the minister responsible for children's services. What is the significance of the departure of the commissioner to this important community-based initiative?

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, before I go ahead and describe what the significance of his departure is, I think it's incumbent upon me to be able to provide some background about the role of the commissioner of services for children and families. It's very important to know that he's the second commissioner that

has been appointed, and his role was to oversee the planning phase of the children's services initiative. He has completed that phase. As of April 1, 1998, we will appoint all of the 17 regions that are still left. He brought it to this phase, and now we are going into another phase which is going to require some other person to be able to carry it through.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. How, then, is the transition to occur for these new child and family services authorities?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all we've got a transition committee together who will oversee what has to happen in the transition from the point when we start appointing these boards. But I think it's really important that people are aware that we are now advertising, and specifically this month you will see some advertisements that will go out calling for people to sit on these boards. We're hoping that everyone who's interested in children and families will come forward, put their names forward. That information then will go through what we call a phasing out, where people in the communities will be involved to look at who should be sitting on these boards. That information will come to me, and hopefully we'll be able to get those boards in place by April 1.

2:20

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Could the minister advise the Assembly on the status of the work of the Calgary Rockyview regional authority?

MS CALAHASEN: Before I go on and talk about region 4, Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important also that we've got a very key individual who has been working very hard in the transition phase, and that's Mr. David Steeves, who has been the deputy secretary to cabinet. What a wonderful man to oversee that specific area.

Mr. Speaker, on the point of what will happen with region 4, they are now preparing their business plan. We know that they will be coming forward probably by April with a business plan that will reflect the needs of the community within Calgary and region. I know that the board has been working very closely with the department on transitional plans to ensure a smooth and orderly transition. I know this will be the case with every authority, and I know that as I speak, the people in Alberta are looking forward to seeing these authorities take control of children and families and the responsibility and authority for those children and families.

Thank you.

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

### **VLT Plebiscites**

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A landslide majority of people in Fort McMurray voted to get rid of VLTs. Now, with help from the pro gambling special interests, the government is denying the community's democratic will. To the minister responsible for VLTs: what is happening to the money being taken out of Fort McMurray right now while your pro gambling friends tie up this community in court? Should it not be put in a trust fund, or is it in government pockets?

Thank you.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, before I get to the actual specifics on the question, in his preamble he indicated that we were shirking our responsibility to the democratic process and principles. Let me tell you that the people of Alberta have the right to go to an appeal at a court, and any person can go there. If you think this government is going to deny that process, you're sadly mistaken.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on this particular issue the people of the municipality of Wood Buffalo went to the polls on a plebiscite basis. They voted in favour of removing the VLTs. There was an appeal to the courts by the people who live there, and the court is hearing the case. In the meantime, until that hearing is completed, the VLTs will stay put. Once the decision on the appeal is made by the court, then we will take action either to leave them there or to remove them, but until that court case is heard, there'll be no action taken there.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, we'll see if we can keep this below three minutes today.

My first supplemental.

### **Speaker's Ruling Brevity**

THE SPEAKER: We've been doing really well today. You had three questions in your one question. Now, you come back with one question, and the hon. minister will respond to that one question. If you want to lay three on her, I'm going to give her the right to respond to three.

Please proceed.

### **VLT Plebiscites (continued)**

MR. GIBBONS: My first supplemental. Will the minister commit that the money collected from the VLTs in Fort McMurray will be held in trust until the Premier decides to honour his promise?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, the funds that are coming in from the VLTs and through the lottery funds are coming into the government, and they belong to the people of Alberta.

MR. GIBBONS: My second supplemental, Mr. Speaker, is to the same minister. Is it true that the government supports these court injunctions just so they can keep taking the money from the communities?

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. member isn't suggesting that we would intrude into a judicial process, because that is the furthest from the truth. That is not what the government does. We have honoured a judicial process that has come from that community, and I would hope that no member of this Legislature would ever try to intrude into that, because that is against democracy.

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

### **Advanced Education Tuition Fees**

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, along with other great conversions in history we can now add the minister of advanced education, who has finally recognized that a legislated cap on postsecondary education tuition fees is a good thing. The minister still has a

long way to go to catch up with the Alberta Liberal policy, and if he still wants to make a real commitment to ensuring that postsecondary education is affordable and that every qualified student can reach their full potential in Alberta postsecondary institutions, a tuition cap is a start. A tuition cap may be good because it'll stop tuition fees from escalating through the roof some day, but a 30 percent cap does nothing for students today. To the minister: given that your immediate predecessor as minister of advanced education called a legislated tuition cap – and I quote – a look-good, feel-good thing that would be easy to repeal, what assurance do Alberta students have that your government has any plans to stop and reverse the runaway growth in tuition fees?

MR. DUNFORD: That preamble seemed to stop just short of an obloquy.

In answer to the question, Mr. Speaker, my predecessor that was mentioned today, Jack Ady, left this department in incredibly good shape, and I would wish to spend some time honouring him today. In a year and a half he was able to get stakeholders together and discuss issues, and he's just an absolutely amazing person. He raises tuition, and what do the students do? They give him a plaque. He cuts 21 percent out of the budgets of the institutions, and when he leaves, what do the institutions do? They give him a plaque. He takes tenure away from faculty professors, and when he retires, what do they do? They give him a plaque. This man was just fantastic. If I could fill half of his shoes, then I will be a very, very successful minister of a very important portfolio.

MR. SAPERS: I'd be happy to send him a plaque too, Mr. Speaker.

Given that your government's current policy will barely keep up with the expected growth in postsecondary enrollment, how will institutions ever be able to turn around the devastating impact of your cuts and still try to keep student costs affordable?

MR. DUNFORD: One of the things that we've been trying to do whenever we had a chance in public, Mr. Speaker, is talk about the relationship of funding in the postsecondary system, and while we have many good examples of the private sector in the amount of funding that they've been able to do, I think clearly the time has come to assess the situation. What we're asking for students to do is to increase their investment in their own future, and we're doing that through a tuition policy whereby the institutions can raise the tuition up to a level of 30 percent of net operating cost. Now, to protect students in that, we will cap – I have yet to bring that forward to the caucus, but we would hopefully, then, through legislation bring that in. Certainly the taxpayers have a responsibility, but I think the main ingredient we'll be approaching in the future will be the private sector.

MR. SAPERS: Given that the minister of advanced education and I attended a public forum at Mount Royal College in Calgary just a couple of short days ago and that at that public forum the minister said that debate on a tuition cap is over, that his government will be bringing in a legislated tuition cap, can the minister reconcile that public commitment with the process that now apparently he has to take that policy initiative through?

MR. DUNFORD: A very nice try on the part of the hon. member. But he knows, as I know, that my remarks were taped,



and what I said – it will be on tape, and you can get the tape – is that the debate on the levels of tuition is over. That was my comment. As far as legislation, that has to come into this House, has to go through the process of standing policy committees, has to go to cabinet, and I make the commitment today that my caucus members will have an opportunity to decide whether or not this is what in fact we absolutely need.

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding with members' statements and just to alert all members, we have three members' statements today, and we'll go in this order: first of all, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose; secondly, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert; and then the third member will be the hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

But prior to proceeding to hear first from the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

**head: Introduction of Guests**  
**2:30 (reversion)**

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to have with us Mr. Austin Willis and Mr. Barry Hill in the Speaker's gallery. Some of us will know Austin Willis as an actor from stage and screen. Others will remember him as the host of the CBC production *This Is the Law* during the '60s and '70s. Others will remember him for his work in promoting the film industry here in Alberta during the last 10 years. His wife, Gwen, is with him today. Also in the gallery is Mr. Barry Hill, and I'm going to be speaking about Barry Hill during my member's statement in a few minutes. So I would like to ask them to rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

**head: Members' Statements**

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

**War Remembrance Video Project**

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are a proud nation that has given much of our youth to the preservation of democracy and freedom. But while the federal government looks at sending our youth once again to hostile shores, we should think back to those sacrifices made by Canadians in the great wars and remember them.

The Wetaskiwin Royal Canadian Legion has been in the process of preserving this important history through the accounts of veterans of World War II on videotape. Spearheaded by two men, the accounts of 50 veterans in their own words have been captured for future generations. Noted war correspondent and actor Austin Willis and Wetaskiwin's chief Crown prosecutor, Barry Hill, have made cold history pages live. In hour-long interviews with Austin Willis, heroes of World War II tell their stories.

It is the hope of Willis and Hill that what they've started in Wetaskiwin will inspire other communities to do the same. Legions in communities across the province and indeed the country should look to the Wetaskiwin project as an excellent model to permanently record this history before it fades.

Barry Hill was inspired to embark on this project when he

traveled with his father to Holland for the 50th anniversary of VE Day. At that time a well of memories and experiences were opened that, for Barry, needed to be preserved for future generations. Hill was directed to veteran Austin Willis, who in 1939 as the voice of CBC radio told this nation in September that we were at war. Austin has been a resident of Wetaskiwin for the past 10 years.

These videos are for us all but especially for the children of our community as a way of showing them that despite the terrible cost and waste of war, it is the price that has been paid for our peace.

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

**Health Care System**

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tired of this government avoiding the reality that health care in this province is in crisis. I'm tired of buzzwords like "pressure points" and "communication glitches" being used to pass off a health care system that is struggling to meet the health needs of people.

Let me give you some concrete examples of real people whose needs are not being met. A mother comes into my office. Her son is 23 years old and brain damaged because of a car accident three years ago. There is nothing, no program that is available to him where he lives. Mental health care is in crisis.

A woman talks to me at a public event. She lives in Whitecourt. She takes the day off work, books a baby-sitter, and her husband takes the day off work for her surgery. She gets to Edmonton, and her surgery is canceled: not enough surgery beds.

I received another letter from a constituent who is worried that the numbness she feels could be something serious. Her MRI will only be in seven months. She continues to live with the unknown. More waiting lists.

A nurse tells me that during her shift in emergency they were on red alert. People in need of medical care shuffle from hospital to hospital while medical staff frantically try to meet the demands. Red alerts sadly becoming the norm, long-term care patients placed far away from loved ones because health boundaries are brick walls: it's not good enough, Mr. Speaker. What will it take to make this government realize that if we don't have our health, we have nothing?

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

**Flag Day**

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you. I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to address this Chamber in order to commemorate Flag Day. This Sunday, February 15, marks the 33rd anniversary of the national flag of Canada. On February 15, 1965, the Maple Leaf was raised for the first time on Parliament Hill. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson addressed the Canadian people at the ceremony and stated that this date would always be remembered as a milestone in Canada's national progress. The Speaker of the Senate, Maurice Bourget, also used this occasion to sum up the feelings of many Canadians when he said: the flag is the symbol of the nation's unity, for it beyond any doubt represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief, or opinion. Mr. Speaker, I believe these words still ring true.

There is a strong emotional connection between a nation's flag and its people, and in fact it took almost 40 years and 2,000

designs before the national flag we honour today was finally chosen. There is a similar connection between the people of a province and their own unique flag. In a country as geographically vast and culturally diverse as Canada, each region reflects its own vision and uniqueness. In my 47 years I've experienced this uniqueness, having lived in regions of the country from Goose Bay, Labrador, to Bagotville, Quebec; Vancouver, British Columbia; Frobisher Bay; Yellowknife; and points in between.

Mr. Speaker, I consider today a very special day for this House and the province of Alberta. I would like to commend you for your leadership and foresight, sir, which have led to recent additions to Alberta's Legislative Assembly. The flags for all of Canada's provinces and territories will now hang in this Chamber on a permanent basis. As well, a Canadian flag will now sit on the desk of each member of this Assembly, and they will serve as a reminder of the interdependence of Canada's provinces and a symbol of Alberta's commitment to a unified Canada.

Today those of us fortunate enough to be present in this Chamber are witnessing a demonstration of a renewed and invigorated commitment to this country, this country of Canada. I'm proud to note that Alberta is the first province in Canada to display the flags of all provinces and territories within its Legislature.

Canada, the diverse, expansive, and sometimes harsh country of the north, has been built upon forging relationships of co-operation between the many regions and peoples of this country. It is often said, Mr. Speaker, that while our neighbour to the south founded its nation through revolution, Canada came about by evolution. The symbolic act of recognizing the importance of all the parts of Canada to the health of our country as a whole is an opportune time for us to demonstrate our pride and respect for the citizens of Canada.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**2:40**

**head: Projected Government Business**

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders I would ask that the Government House Leader do now rise and give us the projected government business for next week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can advise the hon. Opposition House Leader that we'll be busy next week. Starting on Tuesday, at 4:30 we will be dealing with Motion 16. That's the approval in general of the fiscal policies of the government. At that time I understand the Leader of the Official Opposition will have an opportunity to respond to the Budget Address. At 5:15 pursuant to Standing Order 19(1)(c) the question will be put on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne because we've reached the 10th day of debate on that matter. We will also be looking at Motion 17. At 8 that evening we will again deal with Motion 16, and if the Leader of the Opposition has not finished his speech, he will be given an opportunity to do so. We will be in Committee of Supply that evening, supplementary supply, day one of two, and then we'll deal with the Order Paper.

On Wednesday we will be back to supplementary supply, day two of two. Under Introduction of Bills the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998, will be introduced and, again, whatever bills are on the Order Paper at that time.

For Thursday, February 19, Executive Council has been designated by the opposition through the budgeting process. We

will have second reading of the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998, and whatever else is on the Order Paper at that time.

THE SPEAKER: Prior to calling Orders of the Day, we have one point of order to deal with.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

**Point of Order  
Parliamentary Language**

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Family and Social Services, in response to a question put by my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition, used the term "mislead." The question that was put related to the \$2 surcharge or tax or user fee, whatever you want to call it, the \$2 cost that's been imposed for people on AISH for some of their prescriptions. The fact is – and the minister confirmed the fact – that some people on AISH will pay \$2 as a co-payment for some of their prescriptions. That's simply the reference that was in the leader's question.

Now, under *Beauchesne* 489 it is very clear that "mislead" is unparliamentary. There are several other references in *Beauchesne* where "mislead," "mised," "misleading" are all considered unparliamentary. Our Standing Orders are also very clear under 23(h) that you would call a member to order if that member "makes allegations against another member," and to accuse another member of purposely misleading is such an allegation. To even suggest that the member would mislead is an allegation. And again, under subsection (j): to use "abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Mr. Speaker, to accuse another member of this House of misleading is abusive, it is insulting, and it would certainly constitute language that would create disorder. I would ask that the Minister of Family and Social Services do the honourable thing: withdraw the allegation, withdraw the remark "mislead," because he clearly stated himself that that is part of the government's policy. I know that he would want to maintain the dignity of this Assembly and withdraw unparliamentary language.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I did make the allegation of misleading – and there's no doubt about that – because what the hon. Leader of the Opposition had said was that there was a \$2 tax that was to be employed on people from AISH. That is far from the truth. That is telling an untruth. That is not telling the truth, and that's telling a lot of other things that are not true. If that isn't misleading, then I guess it isn't. Under *Beauchesne* 490 it's clear that "misleading" is a parliamentary term.

THE SPEAKER: Oftentimes, hon. members, when a question has been forwarded to a member of Executive Council and the member from Executive Council gets up to respond to the question, there are interjections. Today with this point of order we have a situation where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has used the word "mislead." In fact, the minister himself has confessed he has used the word "mislead," but I have the Blues in front of me. Now, what I heard was "mised," and what the Blues say is "mised."

So the interesting thing here is that we have a point of order raised with one word and the minister actually saying: yes, I've said it. The fact is that the Speaker, who was in the chair, never heard it. What he heard was "mised," and what he has in front

of him is the Blues saying "misled." Now, the more interesting thing is that "misled" can be interpreted to be both parliamentary and unparliamentary, depending on the context in which it is used.

I think that it is wise not to use inflammatory language, number one. It's also wise for the person who raised the question to listen to the answer so that there's absolute clarification in terms of what is being exchanged. I sense that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who raised his point, and the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services, who responded to the point – and this probably boils down to more clarification in an unfortunate situation where there were so many interruptions so that all clarity was not there. The Blues clearly say "misled." In any circumstance it's not appropriate. So shame on you both for confessing to something you didn't do, and let's move on.

head: **Orders of the Day**

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I believe it would be appropriate for me at this time to move that the Assembly temporarily adjourn until 4 p.m. to accommodate the Budget Address.

THE SPEAKER: It most certainly would be appropriate, Government House Leader. All those in favour of the motion as proposed by the hon. Government House Leader, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned from 2:46 p.m. to 4 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have the pleasure of calling on the hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have received certain messages from His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1999, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits supplementary estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1998, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 1999, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly. Please be seated.

head: **Government Motions**

9. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 1997-98 supplementary supply estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried]

10. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly do resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Motion carried]

11. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 1998-99 lottery fund estimates, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried]

12. Mr. Havelock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(2.1) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 1998-99 lottery fund estimates shall be one day.

[Motion carried]

13. Mr. Havelock moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 58(6) the number of days that the Committee of Supply will be called to consider the 1997-98 supplementary supply estimates shall be two days.

[Motion carried]

14. Mr. Havelock moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly resolve itself into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Motion carried]

15. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the message of His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the estimates and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Motion carried]

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, before moving Motion 16, I am tabling the government's 1997-98 quarterly budget report, third quarter update. This information is being reported publicly as required under section 11 of the Balanced Budget and Debt Retirement Act.

I'm also tabling the government's consolidated fiscal and business plan as required under section 4 of the Government Accountability Act.

Budget '98 also includes business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of this act.

head: **Budget Address**

16. Mr. Day moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and privilege to

introduce to you and to all Albertans Budget '98, the government's new agenda for opportunity. This budget is about taking opportunities when we have them and building new opportunities for our future. It's a budget that brings good news for the people of Alberta, good news about promises kept, budgets balanced, and continuing careful stewardship of Albertans' tax dollars, good news that this government will keep its commitment to the people of Alberta, a commitment to stay the course on fiscal responsibility, continue to pay down the debt, and reinvest wisely in their priorities.

Budget '98 brings good news about a thriving economy, more and more jobs for Albertans, and exciting opportunities for the future. It also brings good news about reinvestment plans, plans with a deliberate focus on preparing Alberta's next generation for a new and exciting future.

Budget '98 brings good news to every Alberta taxpayer. I'm pleased to announce that effective January 1, 1998, personal income tax rates in Alberta are going down. Mr. Speaker, Alberta's personal income tax rates will go down from 45.5 percent of the basic federal rate to 44 percent. Albertans will pay \$123 million less in taxes to their provincial government. While that is not a huge saving for each Albertan, we will continue to have the lowest taxes in Canada. The only way taxes will go in Alberta is down. Combined with the increase this year in the Alberta family employment tax credit, Alberta families earning \$30,000 will see their family employment tax credit increase from \$300 to \$800 and their total tax bill will be cut in half. That's what I call the Alberta advantage: helping those who need it the most to take care of their families and themselves.

Now for more good news in Budget '98. I want to begin with a look at Alberta's economic picture. It's critical for us to frame our expectations with a clear understanding of what lies ahead for Alberta's economy and the province's revenues. Since 1992 Alberta has had the fastest growing economy in Canada. Think about these facts. Alberta's economy grew by an estimated 5.5 percent in 1997, outpacing the rest of Canada. In fact, it's one of the highest growth rates in the industrialized world. A record number of Albertans were employed last year, and Alberta's unemployment rate dropped to the lowest it's been since 1981. Average weekly earnings rose by 4 percent in 1997, almost double the national average. Retail sales led the rest of Canada. Housing starts were at the highest level they've been since 1982, and growth in business investment is the highest it's been since 1981. With those results it's no wonder people are looking at Alberta and saying, "That's the place I want to be," and, Mr. Speaker, they are right.

Those results also translate into a single word for Albertans and Alberta businesses: confidence. Confidence that we can keep investing wisely, take on new business ventures, expand our markets around the world, and the outcome will be opportunities for ourselves, our families, and our children.

As we look ahead through 1998 and beyond, signs point to continued strong growth in Alberta's economy. We're forecasting growth at 4.6 percent in 1998. That's something the people of Alberta can all be proud of. It's due to the hard work and energy of Albertans and their strong determination to seize on every opportunity and build an Alberta that is second to none. Looking ahead, Albertans can expect to see more jobs, more investment, and continuing consumer confidence. We expect to see strong employment growth: 156,000 new jobs for Albertans over the next four years and a continuing drop in unemployment.

#### 4:10

In the face of all this good news, Mr. Speaker, I express a few words of caution. We all know that Alberta's revenues can go up or down. From one year to the next our revenues can swing up or down by a billion dollars, and for those who have been tracking the price of oil over the past few weeks, it's a stark reminder of just how volatile our revenues can be. There were times last year when some people criticized us for budgeting with assumptions that were too prudent, too conservative. Those critics have fallen silent lately as Alberta resource prices have dropped and the wisdom of careful budgeting has become abundantly clear.

Between October '97 and January '98 oil prices dropped from \$22.76 a barrel to a low of \$15.74. This week the price has been hovering around \$16.50. Frankly, we don't know what the price will be next week. In the face of that uncertainty the key facts to remember are these. If we had a drop in price of \$7 a barrel over a full year, the result would be well over a billion dollar reduction in provincial revenues, roughly a quarter of what we spend on Alberta's health system alone. This government will not take that risk. We will not set our sights and plans on revenues when they are at their peak, and we will not forget what can happen when provincial revenues drop with little warning, even when Alberta's economy is growing. This government will never again put the financial security of the province at risk, and that is a promise.

In the past the kind of price drop we saw in the last few months would have caused grave concerns for all of us, but this time our concerns are tempered somewhat. Over the past few years Alberta's economy has become more diversified. We've seen increases in manufacturing, retail sales, exports, and other sectors of the economy. Together with actions this government has taken to get our spending in line and pay down our debt, it means we are in much better shape to handle unexpected hits on the economy.

At the same time, we need to remember that resource revenues still make up about 20 percent of government's total revenues. Lower prices are an important signal to Albertans and to those who have their minds firmly fixed on increased spending, and that signal is: be very careful; spend only what you can afford, only what you can count on. That's exactly what we're doing.

Overall, projections in Budget '98 are for a drop in revenues of about \$1.5 billion. In part, that drop is because we're coming off an exceptionally strong year in 1997, but it's also because we're expecting resource revenues to be lower in 1998. We've projected the average price of oil at \$17.50 a barrel, down \$1.62 from the current year, and the price of gas at \$1.70, down 6 cents from last year's forecast. With those lower prices and a drop in land sales, we're forecasting a drop of \$1.1 billion in resource revenues this year.

With the uncertainty of oil prices in recent weeks, I've already heard some Albertans ask: can we afford the spending plans you've announced? And I'm sure they're asking today: can we afford a tax cut? The answer is: yes, because we've planned carefully. We've balanced competing demands. We've taken a careful and deliberate approach, and today we're able to reinvest with confidence in what counts most for Albertans. But for those who say, "You're not spending enough," or "We're not back to the spending levels we were at in 1992 before the cuts," my answer is this: we will spend only as much as we can afford, and we are not aiming at the high-water mark of spending we reached in 1992. We couldn't afford it then; we cannot afford it today.

Mr. Speaker, that balanced approach also means that we've

learned the lessons from the past. This is a budget with levers and mechanisms to slow down spending if the dollars aren't there. This is a budget which promotes prosperity but allows us to shift gears to guard against a deficit. All spending will be monitored with clear outcome measures, measures which focus our efforts on the goals we set and results we expect to achieve.

This year's budget keeps us on the responsible and balanced course we set five years ago. Because of the actions we've taken, we're now in a position to take an important step in the right direction, and that is to lower personal income taxes for every Albertan. Mr. Speaker, this government has a commitment to Albertans: Albertans will pay the lowest taxes in Canada and pay no sales tax. It's a source of pride for our province, and it's a key part of Alberta's competitive advantage. The signal in Budget '98 is right, the direction is right, and Albertans can take a clear message that the only way their taxes are going is down. A two-income family earning \$55,000 a year will save about \$100 a year as a result of today's tax cut announcement. For lower income families the savings will be much higher.

Families who qualify under the family employment tax credit will see the maximum credit increase from \$500 to \$1,000, and that's good news for thousands of Alberta families. That's real money, hard cash they can use to support their families instead of sending it to the provincial government. In total, this important tax program is a direct benefit to 160,000 low- and middle-income working families and 320,000 children. Mr. Speaker, this is a government that cares about children and shows it in a way that counts, by putting money back into the hands of their parents.

Albertans will also see other changes on the tax front in '98. Provincial school property taxes will go down in 1998 for the fifth consecutive year. Planned reductions in machinery and equipment tax will also go ahead in 1998. Based on investment decisions announced in the past year, it looks like industry may meet the investment targets we set two years ago. A decision on the next steps will be made when we get the latest investment information in March.

In total, the tax changes we've made over the last four years plus the ones I'm announcing today mean savings to individuals and businesses of more than \$500 million. That's money that stays in the pockets of the people, supports families, stays with businesses for reinvestment, and stays working in Alberta's economy.

Mr. Speaker, participants at the Growth Summit discussed the need to maintain Alberta's overall competitive tax advantage across the board. As announced by Premier Klein, our new tax review committee will be up and running within the next few weeks. They will work closely with the Alberta Economic Development Authority to review Alberta's personal and corporate income tax system. I look forward to receiving their advice and recommendations on how we might simplify the system and, hopefully, lighten the tax load on Albertans even more. Our tax review will address suggestions which will enable small and large business to thrive and create opportunities for Albertans in an atmosphere of sustainable development.

Low taxes will continue to be a key part of the Alberta advantage. But with a growing economy and expanding business opportunities it is critical that we also reinvest in developing the best educated and most highly skilled young people. That's the focus of our spending plans in Budget '98.

Mr. Speaker, as Premier Klein outlined in his message to Albertans in January, the priorities for reinvestment in Budget '98 focus on people, on preparing Alberta's next generation, making

sure that young Albertans have the skills and talents they need to succeed and keep building this province. To borrow a few words from Premier Klein, our government's new agenda for opportunity is based on five simple rules, rules Albertans have told us to follow.

One, remain fiscally responsible without ever running a deficit again or raising taxes.

Two, be unwavering in your commitment to pay off the debt.

Three, keep looking for new, better, and more efficient ways of doing things.

Four, when we have the money, reinvest in Albertans' priorities, and for this year that means putting children first.

Five, listen to what Albertans say as you remain accountable and honest.

Those five simple rules sum up the direction we've taken in Budget '98.

Albertans looking at today's spending plans will see a clear focus on what counts most: programs for people, for children, and Alberta's next generation. This reflects a clear message from the Growth Summit. Mr. Speaker, many of the key announcements in education and health will come as no surprise to the people of Alberta. These announcements were made earlier in January so we could give our partners in health and education as much lead time as possible to begin their own budget plans.

As announced by Premier Klein, our goal in education is for Alberta's young people to be the best educated in Canada. A package of initiatives set out by our government will put the emphasis on the early years of schooling, making sure that young children learn to read. This means that more teacher aides and intern teachers will be hired to provide necessary support to teachers in the classroom. Support for students with mild and moderate special needs will be increased by 30 percent and for students with severe mental and physical disabilities will also be increased by 30 percent. Improvements will be made in the curriculum so that Alberta students will continue to achieve high standards, succeed in postsecondary education, and are able to compete with the best in the world.

#### 4:20

We'll work with schools and the business community to make sure that Alberta's young people are well prepared for the workforce, and we'll reinvest money from this year's surplus to address critical needs for building new schools and repairing older ones. In 1998-99 total spending on education will increase by 5.7 percent to almost \$3.2 billion. That's a number you don't want to get wrong. That's on top of a 4.6 percent increase in '97-98.

On the postsecondary side our emphasis will be on making sure Albertans have access to quality learning opportunities, building a highly skilled workforce, and expanding research excellence. A new Alberta opportunities bursary program will provide up to 15,000 bursaries to first- and second-year postsecondary students who need financial support. Funding for heritage scholarships will be increased, recognizing the talents of Alberta's best and brightest young people.

Consistent with the advice from the Growth Summit, additional funding also will be provided to expand apprenticeship programs. These programs are essential to make sure Alberta's industries have the highly skilled people they need to meet the demands of a growing economy.

On the research side we'll work with universities to revitalize research infrastructure and attract the best researchers to Alberta. Spending on postsecondary education will increase by 3.1 percent in '98-99 to a total of almost \$1.2 billion, and that's on top of a 5.5 percent increase in '97-98.

Mr. Speaker, in Health we will continue to focus on improving the health of Albertans and the quality of the health system. Albertans put a high priority on health care. Delegates at the Growth Summit spent time and attention on health issues, and this government is listening. Budget '98 follows through on our commitment to reinvest in health and to keep working with people in the health system to provide stability, improve access to health services, and make sure we have a health system Albertans can count on.

Support for regional health authorities will increase by 3.1 percent per year over the next three years. By 2001 financial support for highly specialized, lifesaving medical services provided in Edmonton and Calgary will be up by 29 percent.

We'll also address other pressure points in health, adding \$3 million to the rural physician action plan so we can attract and keep doctors in rural communities. New technologies will be used to link rural physicians to specialists through telehealth initiatives. A review of long-term care will explore new options for providing services to an aging population. By increasing the dollars allotted for physician services to \$819 million in '98, we are addressing population increases and a 5.5 percent increase to physicians over the next three years.

We'll move ahead on a new health information system to ensure that we have better information to help make good decisions and improve health. We'll develop new legislation to protect the privacy of health information. We'll also provide additional funding for drugs and medical supplies and to help people in palliative care with the support they need.

With this year's budget, spending on health will increase in '98-99 by 4.8 percent to \$4.2 billion, and that's on top of an increase of 4.7 percent in '97-98.

Mr. Speaker, not only the provincial government but also regional health authorities, doctors, nurses, and others working in the health system must commit to the ongoing task of maximizing our limited resources in the delivery of first-class health services. Every province faces the same challenge. We are attempting to deliver a top-quality service and product at no visible cost to the consumer. Every law of economics and every real-life application of these laws clearly demonstrates what a significant challenge we face in maintaining a first-class system – and we will – while keeping costs under control.

This government clearly supports and upholds the principles of the Canada Health Act. The delivery of quality health service to all Albertans is absolutely a top priority. However, to achieve this goal we must all work together to seek out the ideas and initiatives which will see the people of Alberta properly cared for and cared for in a system where the growth in costs is managed carefully to protect our ability to fund not only the health system but also other essential areas of government service.

Mr. Speaker, the budget and business plans we're tabling today for other ministries list hundreds of initiatives our government is taking, and I only want to highlight a few of these today.

In Family and Social Services a key focus will be on helping children in need. Mr. Speaker, we're able to put that focus on children because of the deliberate actions we've taken to reduce the number of Albertans on welfare. Welfare caseloads are down 63 percent since March 1993, and most of those people have moved off the welfare rolls and onto the employment rolls, giving them the chance they need to support themselves and their families.

A new child health benefits program will be introduced in August '98 and will help pay for basic drug, dental, optical, and

ambulance services for children from low-income families. We will continue working with our federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts on a national children's agenda. We will work with communities to implement a new regional approach to delivering services to children and families. We will spearhead new initiatives targeted at reducing drinking during pregnancy so more babies will get a healthy start in life. We'll take action on reducing juvenile prostitution, and we will increase current levels of support for women's shelters and family and community support services.

Within the provincial government we are fortunate to have a dedicated public service, people who work hard to make their province a better place. Employees are finding new and better ways of doing things, and it's time they were recognized for their success. This year we will introduce a new achievement bonus program to reward performance of the public service when they achieve budget and business plan targets. Mr. Speaker, this is a first in Canada.

With a growing economy there are natural pressures on Alberta's infrastructure. As announced in January, \$260 million will be invested in transportation, schools, health equipment, and postsecondary facilities and equipment. A new capital investment planning committee is reviewing infrastructure strategies and will help set investment target levels. In future, if Alberta continues to run surpluses, the first billion dollars will go to the debt. The next \$250 million will go to onetime initiatives, including infrastructure and other priorities, one year at a time and only if we have the money.

In total, Mr. Speaker, we will spend \$13.9 billion on programs and services for Albertans in 1998-99. With spending at that level and prudent revenue forecasts, we expect to end the year with a surplus of \$165 million. If our legislated revenue cushion is not needed to protect against revenue shocks, the surplus could increase to \$585 million.

As I mentioned earlier, we are determined to take the responsible course, never again spending more than we can afford. Some may think that with a growing economy and a string of past surpluses we can afford to open the bank vault and give away money for any number of good reasons, but that's not why people elected the Ralph Klein government. The people of Alberta elected us to do the right thing: to take the responsible course, to keep a careful eye on the bottom line, and to reinvest only where it's needed. That's exactly what they'll see today with Budget '98.

Mr. Speaker, taking the responsible course also means paying down our debts, so let me turn now to our continuing plans for paying down Alberta's debt. Albertans have told us: keep paying down the debt, and pay as you go. Albertans don't feel right about spending money today and then passing the bills on to their children and their children's children, and we've listened. We've made great progress in eliminating debt. With the surplus expected by March 31, '98, Alberta's net debt will go down to \$1.5 billion, and the good news is that Alberta's net debt could be eliminated entirely by the time we celebrate the beginning of a new millennium. That would be cause for celebration. That will be a major milestone and a giant step on the road to full fiscal health.

4:30

But, Mr. Speaker, let us not fool ourselves. After we bring the net debt to zero, which means our liabilities no longer exceed our assets, we will still owe money from past borrowing to cover the deficits of 1985 to '94. We will have paid back about a third of

what we owe. Roughly \$14 billion will be left on the books as debt that we owe to our creditors. We'll still need to pay about a billion dollars a year in interest payments, and that's money we cannot spend on anything else. Think about what we could do tomorrow if that billion dollars didn't have to go to our creditors and we could use it in areas that count most for Albertans.

When our net debt is gone, Albertans will have some important decisions to make, not about whether or not we keep paying down the remaining debt but about how quickly we do that. Do we put ourselves on a fast track to get rid of the \$14 billion that we will still owe? How do we balance that against the pressures of today and the need to keep our tax advantage as strong as possible? What happens if revenues drop unexpectedly? These are questions we want to discuss with Albertans this year, and their advice will shape a new plan for dealing with the rest of Alberta's debt. By next year's budget day Albertans will see the next plan for paying back the debts from the past.

Mr. Speaker, those are the highlights of Budget '98. I hope that Albertans listening today or hearing the budget news this evening will look at their government's agenda for opportunity and say, "It's the right course." We've taken the opportunities we have today and we've put Albertans first. We've provided a personal tax cut and targeted the biggest tax reduction to those who need it the most. We've reinvested in children and the next generation of Albertans. We've responded to the pressures of growth in health and education and on Alberta's essential infrastructure. And we've paved the way for growing opportunities in a dynamic and thriving province. That's a balanced budget package that makes Alberta the envy of every province in Canada.

I close with a few comments about the vision that underlies the decisions we've made in Budget '98. There are those who believe we should have an all-powerful government providing for every need in every facet of life. Their vision means government must plan the lives of its citizens. But a careful look at governments around the world over the last 30 years clearly shows that the more government tries to unnecessarily interfere in the lives of its citizens, the more it will stifle initiative and growth as people become weary under the weight of excessive government and taxation.

I believe this government shows a crystal clear vision. It's a vision firmly grounded in what we know about Albertans, Albertans who are happy to chart their own course rather than wait for government to do it for them. Mr. Speaker, I know most

Albertans aren't sitting on the edge of their seat this afternoon asking, "What can my government do for me?" They're waiting to hear that we're doing what needs to be done: taking care of the right priorities, providing responsible and limited government, and creating an atmosphere that allows the initiatives of citizens to flourish with as little government encumbrance as possible. By taking that approach, we allow our people to set their own personal sights and achieve their own dreams. Albertans believe in the principles of personal responsibility and freedom. That means that as legislators let us always pursue and promote policies which limit the weight of government and taxation, and let us resist the temptation to plan and plot the pathway from cradle to grave.

Mr. Speaker, Budget '98 reflects a vision we share with the people of Alberta. It reflects a framework based on caring and responsibility. It allows an unlimited future of opportunity for our children. It encourages the development of our citizens as they choose their own pathways to happiness. I am confident that if we remember the lessons from the past and take our lead from the people of Alberta, we will continue to make the right decisions.

Mr. Speaker, lessons of the past remind me of that famous bumper sticker. It has something to do with praying for another economic boom and promising not to fritter it all away this time. It speaks about learning some hard lessons and managing better. Well, to that brave soul who thought up that bumper sticker, wherever you are, your prayers are assured. The economy is strong. We're managing carefully. The future is ours.

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion as moved by the hon. House leader of the Official Opposition, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

[Pursuant to Standing Order 3(4)(a) at 4:38 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

