

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, February 23, 1998 1:30 p.m.
Date: 98/02/23
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. The prayer today is one that is said in the British Columbia Legislative Assembly.

Let us pray.

As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, we ask for divine guidance so our words and deeds may bring to all people of this great province hope, prosperity, and a vision for the future.

May the deliberations in this Chamber be characterized by temperance, understanding, and reason to the end that we may better serve those who have made the members of this House guardians of and trustees for all of the citizens of Alberta.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, in 1990 this Assembly enacted legislation that established governing structures for eight Métis settlements in Alberta. Over the last seven years, through the administration of this new legislation, areas where improvements could be made have been identified. In addition other provincial legislation has been reviewed to determine where changes could be made to accommodate the 1990 legislation for Métis settlements. Today my colleague from Bonnyville-Cold Lake will introduce Bill 17, reflecting the experience of the settlements over the last several years and to recognize further settlements as governments within Alberta.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly the executive of the Métis Settlements General Council, President Ken Noskey and Vice-president Dennis Cunningham, and settlement chairpersons from seven of the eight settlements together with a councillor from the eighth: Greg Calliou from Paddle Prairie, Brian Supernault from East Prairie, Frank Gauchier from Peavine, Richard Anderson of Gift Lake, Glen Auger from Buffalo Lake, Councillor Dean Thompson from Kikino, and Chairman Archie Collins from Elizabeth. Carmen Fayant from Fishing Lake was to be here in attendance; however, due to a death in his community he wasn't able to be here.

Also, I'd like to introduce through you the commissioner of the Métis Settlements Transition Commission, Mr. Randy Hardy, and with him today two people who have been instrumental in Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs in assisting with this legislation, Mr. Tom Ghostkeeper and Mr. Cameron Henry. I'd like these representatives to stand and receive the warm welcome and recognition of this House.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I beg leave today to present the following petitions which have been received for private bills under Standing Order 93(2):

1. the petition of Tanya Marie Bryant for the Tanya Marie Bryant Adoption Termination Act,
2. the petition of David Luckwell and H.L. Burke Enterprises

- Ltd. for the Innovative Insurance Corporation Amendment Act, 1998,
 3. the petition of the Alberta Wheat Pool for the Alberta Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 1998,
 4. the petition of Donald A. Wheaton and Donald H. Wheaton for the Millennium Insurance Corporation Act.
- Those are all of the petitions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition from the Alberta Historical Preservation & Rebuilding Society that they have asked me to read.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to:

1. Historically designate the "Crown Building" on the Stephen Avenue . . .
as well as
 - i) The Neilson Block . . .
 - ii) Doll Block . . .
 - iii) The Grand Saddlery Building . . .
 - iv) The building next to the Imperial Bank Building: 104 - 8 Ave. S.E.
2. to immediately stop demolition, and removal of these historic buildings in part or whole
3. get the City of Calgary and the developer to incorporate all the buildings above into the new . . . convention centre . . .
4. to act immediately, as this is an urgent matter.

Mr. Speaker, they also wanted me to mention that they collected these signatures in a three-hour period on a Sunday afternoon just before Christmas.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

Bill 17

Metis Settlements Statutes Amendment Act, 1998

MR. DUCHARME: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of friends and acquaintances residing on the eight Alberta Métis settlements, I am most honoured and pleased to introduce Bill 17, the Metis Settlements Statutes Amendment Act, 1998.

The proposed act addresses the need for legislative changes to streamline administrative processes, to increase the effectiveness of government funding arrangements, and to recognize Métis settlements as a unique form of local government. These changes support the government and settlement objectives aimed at increasing the accountability, self-reliance, and self-regulation of the Métis people in Alberta. The presence of the Métis settlement representatives here today reflects their support of the proposed legislative changes.

Thank you.

[Leave granted; Bill 17 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 17 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table four copies of the responses to some questions raised during Committee of the Whole on the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act, Bill 6. I'll also be providing responses directly to those members who raised those questions.

Thank you.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to table a report on the co-operative mode of public transportation systems among Strathcona county, St. Albert, and Edmonton. The paper, which addresses a number of perceptions and answers them with real information, was presented to the capital region caucus and I believe would be of interest to members of the Legislature.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to file letters of congratulations I sent on behalf of the government to the Alberta athletes who won medals at the Nagano Winter Olympics and their coaches.

I'm also filing letters congratulating Red Deer mayor, Gail Surkan; 1998 Alberta Winter Games host society chair, Tom Ganger, and Red Deer county reeve, Morris Lewis, for the fine job their community did in hosting the Alberta 1998 Winter Games this past weekend.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of the resolutions from the Women of Unifarm. They deal with health care, their concerns about privatization; Transportation and Utilities, the maintenance of roads; and farm safety. Also, they would like vehicles to have a front licence plate. These are the resolutions. I'm sure all will be interested.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two documents to table. Firstly, copies of certain overhead transparencies which Mr. Paul Rushforth used in a February 5, 1998, presentation to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. The transparencies graphically demonstrate the inadequacy of government support for Calgary's burgeoning population.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is copies of a letter from the Calgary board of education to the Minister of Education dated February 17, 1998, requesting yet again for an honouring of the commitment to establish a process to review the funding framework for all education in Alberta.

Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 109 I am pleased to table with the Assembly the ninth annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 1997. This report includes the first annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and a copy of the report has been circulated to all members.

head: Introduction of Guests

1:40

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

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of young, energetic Albertans from the town of Athabasca and area. These young people are in Edmonton today to participate in the launching of four excellent television advertisements that they have worked very hard to produce. The ads encourage other young Albertans to remain tobacco free. So if you turn your TV on in the near future, Mr. Speaker, you might see these young individuals and others from that area in a smoke-free restaurant. I congratulate these young Albertans for their leadership in this area, and I would ask Leah Schmidek, Ana Kavaz, Erin Voaklander, and Paul Chiernyk to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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 Legislative Assembly 24 students from St. Matthew Catholic school. They are accompanied today by their teacher Ms Rena Hanchuk and her helper Ms Grace Yanda. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce another group of young teenagers. This is a group from Peace River who produced one of the television commercials to help reduce smoking and tobacco use among teens. I'd like to suggest that not only are these committed nonsmokers, but previewing the commercial this morning, I'd suggest that they have promise as TV producers. The ones from Peace River are Corene Brown, Cassidy Sheehan, Shelli Kolay-Moore, and Erika Brown. They're here with their co-ordinator from the Peace health region, Jill Plaizier. They are standing. If we could show them the traditional warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 47 grade 10 students from the Sturgeon composite high school. They are accompanied by their teacher Mr. Norman Zweifel. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker it is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a young lady who is an exchange student visiting from Brittany, France. Camille Pape is here accompanied by Dennis Pommen. Camille is an exchange student taking her grade 12 courses in Sherwood Park, my constituency. She has a particular interest in the government of Canada, in economic and social aspects of society. Please join me in a warm welcome for our guest this afternoon.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky I would like to introduce two students from Grande Prairie. These people are in Edmonton today to launch four excellent television advertisements that they have worked hard to produce.

The ads encourage other young Albertans to remain tobacco free. I'd like to congratulate these young Albertans for their leadership in this area, and I would ask Ryan Kostiuk and R.B. Hopkins to rise to receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to wish congratulations to some dynamic students who were involved in the No, No, No to Tobacco advertisements that were filmed actually in Slave Lake in the St. Mary of the Lake school. There are some really dynamic advertisements that we'll be seeing, which I think have been excellent in showing the people from St. Mary of the Lake and their vitality. I'd ask Ryley Desjarlais, Lauren McLennan, and Ryan Saunders to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you three wonderful people who have motored up from Calgary to take advantage of the two major tourist attractions in this city: West Edmonton Mall and of course the Legislative Assembly. I'd ask Terrance Yoxall, Wendy Yoxall, and son Blair Yoxall to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Ministerial Statements

Alberta Winter Games

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, this past weekend I saw a tremendous display of athletic achievements. Today I rise to tell this Assembly and all Albertans about Alberta's talented young athletes who competed in the Alberta Winter Games in Red Deer from February 19 to 22. From the opening ceremonies – our Premier officially opened the games – to the closing of the games by His Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor the games were a wonderful success.

I had the privilege of watching many of the competitions and meeting several of the athletes, coaches, and volunteers. I saw how well the games were organized and how smoothly everything went, and for that I thank Tom Ganger and the 1998 Alberta Winter Games host society for the tremendous job they did in planning and hosting these games. The work of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation was also essential to the success of the games. Working in partnership with communities and local organizers, the foundation and staff contributed immensely to the games as well.

The people of Red Deer and area were wonderful hosts to the over 2,500 athletes and coaches and thousands more family members and spectators who attended the games. The incredible support and hospitality shown by Red Deer sponsors and volunteers are proof of this community's dedication to amateur sport in Alberta. The games have many long-term benefits for both the host community and the participants. The experience and enthusiasm of Red Deer and the surrounding communities and their volunteers and sponsors will help that region continue its strong tradition of hosting major events for years to come. As for the athletes I'm sure many of this year's participants will join other Alberta Games alumni who have gone on to represent Canada on the international stage.

In addition to the athletic competitions themselves there were many cultural events including a concert, dance performances, a gum ball mural, and an anthology of works by Alberta writers.

The theme of the 1998 Alberta Winter Games was the Spirit of Youth, and let me tell you, that spirit was definitely alive in Red Deer this weekend. The young people I met this weekend filled me with confidence that our province's future is in very good hands. I must tell this Assembly that I was also very impressed with the calibre of play from every zone in our province. One of the things I was most pleased to note is that teams from some of our smaller communities made it to the medal round in many sports. I think this is very encouraging to our young athletes wherever they reside in our province.

More important than the medals, however, are the lessons these young people learned about life. In watching them compete in medal round play you could feel their elation in winning and their disappointment in losing, but as these young athletes learned, there is more to the Alberta Winter Games than medals. They learned important lessons about trying their hardest even when it looked like they weren't going win. They learned about supporting their teammates. They learned about picking up and going on after a loss. They learned that true success and self-worth aren't necessarily measured by medals.

One of my privileges when I was at the games was to award the Minister's Cup for the most improved zone, which is zone 4, Parkland, which includes the community of Red Deer. The Alberta Cup for highest overall standings was presented by the Member for Red Deer-South to zone 3, Calgary, and the Spirit of Sport Cup for good sportsmanship was awarded to zone 1, the sunny south.

The young athletes who competed demonstrated great skill, team spirit, and leadership both on and off the field of play. All members of this Assembly and all Albertans should be proud of these young Albertans.

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

1:50

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal opposition I'd like to extend our congratulations to the city of Red Deer for a job well done in hosting the 1998 Alberta Winter Games. I know firsthand the dedication, thousands of volunteer hours, and the details, details, details which go into hosting a large event.

Amateur sports and recreation is an important component in Alberta's quality of life. We must continue to support this. For our youth, amateur sports is a chance to get fit and to learn skills that will last a lifetime. Perhaps more importantly, our youth also learn teamwork: working with others and toward a common goal.

My father always made me enter every contest. Not to win but to learn. I did learn and it was fun. I hope the people involved in the Alberta Winter Games learned and had fun.

The minister mentioned the participation of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. I know that money is sometimes tight there, and I commend the foundation for their support and for the other groups who are funded by that foundation who contributed towards this.

In closing I applaud the participants, the volunteers, and the city of Red Deer. Congratulations.

Winter Olympics

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, on the eve of the 18th Winter

Olympic games in Nagano I stood in this Assembly to wish all Canadian athletes and especially those based in Alberta the best of luck as they prepared to compete for our country. At that time I reported that Alberta-based athletes made up about one-third of Canada's national team. Today I am proud to report that of the 15 medals won by Canadians at the Olympics, eight of these medals, over half the medal total, were won by Alberta-based athletes or teams with Alberta members. This record-setting achievement is a tremendous credit to the quality of our sports programs in this province.

From coaches to volunteers to parents the network of support available to Alberta athletes is clearly second to none in Canada. As well, the success of Alberta-based athletes also speaks volumes about the technical and physical infrastructure available to athletes who train in Alberta. These facilities, such as the speed skating oval in Calgary and the Canmore Nordic Centre, are a legacy of the 1988 Winter Olympics held in Calgary. As was predicted a decade ago, there has been a long-lasting and highly visible impact of those games on the quality of amateur sport training and development in Alberta, an impact that continues to be felt across Canada and across the world.

Further, this legacy will continue to be felt in the future. This year's medal-winning athletes will serve as role models for younger Albertans who are considering involvement in amateur sport. I can't think of any better role models for our youth than Catriona LeMay Doan or Jeremy Wotherspoon or Kevin Overland or Judy Diduck or Pierre Lueders or many of the other Alberta-based medal winners.

There is, of course, much more to Olympics than the final medal count. I am confident that the Canadian athletes who took part in the Olympics will always remember their experience as a tremendous learning opportunity. They had a chance to make friends with athletes from around the world, to learn about different cultures and the timeless bonds of friendship and friendly competition that capture the essence of human experience as we share as equals with everyone around the globe. That to me is the true Olympic spirit. It was evident from the faces of Canadians that we saw on television that our athletes were sharing in that spirit. That is a lesson they will never forget.

On behalf of the government of Alberta and this Legislative Assembly I extend our heartfelt congratulations to the Alberta-based athletes who have made an entire province and an entire country enormously proud. Regardless of the medal count those athletes are all winners, as are the coaches, parents, and family members who supported them in the years when the TV cameras of the world were not focused on them.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal opposition I extend my congratulations to the eight medal-winning Alberta athletes and teams as well as all Albertan athletes in the Nagano Winter Olympics.

I know many people are walking around Alberta today with red eyes from the late nights and early mornings watching the Olympics. The Olympics cross all sectors of the interests of people. It is exciting and we do participate. Our athletes did do us proud, both those who came home with a medal and those who did not. Bravo. Their dedication, focus, and enthusiasm is an inspiration for all of us, no matter what we are attempting to achieve in our personal lives.

The Olympics are still about amateur athletes striving for

perfection, and these amateur athletes inspire us and act as the role models for our youth. I'd like to add a personal thanks to the female athletes from Alberta as well as the women's hockey team and the Schmirler rink from Saskatchewan.

We are fortunate in Alberta to have volunteers and communities who have given us a legacy of organization and facilities to benefit us in amateur sports, those communities like Red Deer and Calgary. My thanks to the coaches, parents, families and friends, and the volunteers who supported our Olympic athletes.

Thank you.

head:

Oral Question Period

Mammography Services

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, women are afraid. Breast cancer is one of the leading killers of women, and now a recently published Canada Health study indicates that half of Canada's mammography facilities are substandard. To the Premier: what percentage of Alberta's mammography clinics are substandard?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. Minister of Health to supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all I certainly recognize, as does Alberta Health and I'm sure all members of the Assembly, that this is a very serious health problem facing Canadian women. With respect to the recent overall assessment or report on the status of breast screening and mammography across Canada I take some satisfaction in reporting but not in any way being complacent that in that same report and afterwards it's been indicated that Alberta's standards are much better than the Canadian average.

Nevertheless, in Alberta Health we are working on the improvement of breast screening in the province. We've been working on an agreement between the radiologists and the Alberta Cancer Board to make our overall coverage much more comprehensive, and it's certainly recognized as an important health issue, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given that the Minister of Health is so convinced, then, that we are above average when it comes to mammography clinic standards in Canada, could the Premier direct the Minister of Health to please table the documents upon which he is basing that assessment?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Minister of Health allude to a report. Obviously that report is a public report, because I recall – and I can't cite the quotes – reading in the newspaper that Alberta was better than average in the Canadian context. I will have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly I would report on the status of breast screening in Alberta and provide a copy of the report the member is referring to. Certainly.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether in preparing that report the Minister of Health could specifically assess each of the mammography clinics in Alberta and release that information so that Alberta women can see it and make informed choices about where to go.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly I'd take the suggestion made by the hon. leader under advisement. I think that

in terms of the application of standards and accreditation through the agencies that are responsible for this, we do monitor the breast screening program very closely.

2:00 Calgary Region Life Expectancies

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Eight hundred and fifty-six thousand Calgarians – that's about one in three Albertans – are served by the Calgary regional health authority. The January 1998 report on the health of Calgarians from that RHA reveals something very troubling. Average life expectancy for both women and men in this region has fallen for the third consecutive year. The report notes that

with these declines in life expectancy, and the probability of further declines, Region 4 will not achieve Alberta Health's goal for a life expectancy in the year 2000 of 77 years for males, and 83 years for females.

My question is to the Minister of Health. Why are life expectancies for men and women in the wealthiest region of the province of Alberta falling?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that, first of all, the question of the hon. member does certainly raise some questions, because overall in the province the life expectancy of Albertans generally has been increasing and approaching the targets that we've set in our overall Health business plan. In fact, they compare very favourably with the rest of Canada.

Now, with respect to these statistics from Calgary, at least in their particular report, I think they need to be checked upon. It is something that Alberta Health and the Calgary regional health authority will have to analyze very carefully and lay plans to act upon.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, given that we're talking about a three-year pattern, I want to know what concrete steps Alberta Health is going to take to address what is a serious concern in the city of Calgary.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have done a number of things. First of all, with respect to our overall Health business plan in this province we are working on setting in place a system of accountability. We have established standards. Also, we have I think provided very significant additional funding to the regional health authority in Calgary. They have had very significant capital support for buildings but, probably much more importantly, for diagnostic equipment and tools over the last number of years. We have to look at how they are being applied and also, of course, look at the overall area of long-term care, which I think is probably an area where we need to put added emphasis.

MR. DICKSON: My next question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister would be this: will the minister, then, be revising his department's target for life expectancy given that about a third of our population probably will live shorter lives?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker. We have set a goal. We want to set goals for the system which are realistic but above where we are at present. We are determined in our overall effort in Health and as a government to improve that figure.

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

Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government received over \$207,000 in revenues during 1996 from an agreement with Burns Foods to operate the Gainers' facility. That's less than a one-tenth of 1 percent rate of return on a \$209 million investment. The Provincial Treasurer still refuses to release the revised lease agreement with Maple Leaf Foods to operate the Gainers' facility so that taxpayers can find out how much they will earn in lease revenue during 1997. Perhaps there is something to hide. To the Provincial Treasurer: why do the financial statements for Gainers contained in your own department's estimates show only \$32,000 – \$32,000 – in lease revenue received from Maple Leaf Foods during 1997-98?

MR. DAY: I'm not exactly sure, Mr. Speaker, but I'll check it out.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Will the Treasurer finally agree to release the revised lease arrangement so that taxpayers can see what sort of sweetheart deal the government cut with Maple Leaf behind closed doors and in secret?

MR. DAY: I'm not sure what reference there is to a behind-closed-doors deal, Mr. Speaker. I do know that the lease presently resides with Public Works, and I'm sure the minister of public works, if there's anything further to add, would be happy to do so.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Mr. Speaker, I think the preamble to that second question and the question itself are extremely inappropriate. The transfer of the lease went from Burns to Maple Leaf. The content of the arrangement between Burns and Gainers Inc. is in the library for everyone to review, and that's been there since 1994. As the hon. member knows, Public Works has reviewed the lease. Maple Leaf is living up to their rights under the lease, and we're ensuring that it doesn't go beyond their rights.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Will the Treasurer please explain why the Gainers lease revenue is only \$32,000 now when you stated that the lease revenue for 1997 would be higher than last year's due to an escalation clause in the lease?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I've already answered that question. I'll check that out and get the details, hopefully by tomorrow.

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

Information Systems Outsourcing

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 1996-97 public accounts supplement released late Friday afternoon demonstrates that when it comes to giving handouts to private business, this government is second to none. A single corporation, IBM, received \$13.1 million in outsourced government contracts last year. IBM is also a controlling shareholder in two other companies, Payment Systems Corporation and Information Systems Management, that received an additional \$20 million in payments. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the Energy department paid out to them about 10 percent of the department's

entire operating budget, what work are IBM and these other two companies doing that could possibly justify such a huge amount of taxpayers' money being directed their way?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I guess, with respect, I'd have to go into the total function of the Department of Energy, which I will do tonight in estimates. To answer the question I would say that last year the Department of Energy, through its royalty systems and other activities in land sales and that, brought in \$4 billion to the province of Alberta, so I would think an information system and a system to co-ordinate the collection of data and process it on a timely basis so that we can collect that type of revenue is important.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Auditor General has reported three years straight that the development of the mineral revenue information system with which IBM is deeply involved is overbudget and behind schedule, will the minister explain why his corporate support services budget is again 15 percent overbudget for 1997-98 and if the taxpayers' money wouldn't have been better used developing an in-house system?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member, coincidentally, later today, at 8 o'clock this evening in fact, in room 512 subcommittee D will be dealing with the main estimates of Energy. Now, if your question deals with something in the past, fine, but if it has to do with the current budget, I think best for this evening.

DR. PANNU: It does, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Energy, do you want to respond?

Information Systems Outsourcing (continued)

DR. WEST: Well, I can go into the details tonight on that, but the information system for the collection of this data, the dissemination of it, and the utilization of it is very, very complex. The simple answer is that the initial forecasting on the cost of getting this operation up and running was wrong. Therefore, the estimates that we had put into our budgets weren't correct. When IBM came back and said that it's going to cost us considerable millions of more dollars, we were already into a system. We had to comply in order to get a complete system. Therefore it comes back that the Auditor General would say, "Did you have a good forecast on the cost of this in the beginning?" and the answer would be, "Probably not." But, then, where it comes to information systems of such magnitude, I don't know who else could have done that either.

2:10

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the hon. Premier. Given that in a single year the government has outsourced huge contracts to these companies and given the Auditor General's repeated criticism of this government's computer outsourcing, will the Premier kindly order a thorough cost-benefit analysis of these various projects and then make public the results it yields?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is a role and a function of the

Auditor General. In the course of his audit of all government operations he makes comments and provides recommendations relative to all of our outsourcing. As it deals with a cost-benefit analysis, the work either has to be done through outsourcing or in-house, and that is the kind of cost-benefit analysis that will be provided in due course, I would assume, by the Auditor General.

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

Youth Drug Abuse Conference

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is regarding the youth conference on drug abuse prevention being held in Banff in mid-April and hosted by the United Nations drug control program, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. According to the memorandum on this conference drug use by youth around the world has started to increase after a long period of decline. Some of the reasons given in the same memorandum for increase in drug use are high levels of youth unemployment, homelessness, and poverty. My question is to the Minister of Community Development. Is this worldwide trend also true in Alberta? Is drug use amongst youth increasing in Alberta?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member and all members of the Assembly that there are both positive and some not so positive trends among youth in Alberta. On the positive side alcohol use among Alberta youth has declined steadily since 1989. The trends in illegal drug usage have remained relatively stable, and I think that while any amount of use is a concern, AADAC's programs are working and we're holding that stable. I should also mention that the work done by parents, community groups, and schools in raising awareness has helped in that area.

There are two exceptions of concern. One is in tobacco usage. That has increased, and I think we should commend the young people who were introduced in the Legislature here today on their positive campaign of saying no to starting smoking. The other one that has shown some increase is in the use of marijuana. So AADAC is responding to those by increasing their focus in those areas.

MR. JOHNSON: My second question is to the hon. Minister of Labour. What are the statistics regarding youth unemployment in Alberta, and do these statistics include youth who have not worked and therefore do not collect UI?

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to say that I'm glad the conference is being held in Banff, Alberta, and not Whistler, B.C.

Alberta's unadjusted youth unemployment in January 1998 was 11.7 percent. This compares to a national average of 16.5 percent. Youth are defined as people from 15 to 24 years of age for this calculation. Alberta's overall rate is 5.8 percent, so it's about twice the normal amount of employment. It includes youth who have not worked but who are actively looking for work, and the statistics would not include youth who have not worked and are not actively looking for work. So what we have is a rate of 11.7 percent in Alberta, where the rate escalates east of Thunder Bay, east of the Ottawa River from 12 percent to as high as 30 percent.

So, you know, I think of the work being done not only to bring

safer workers into the workplaces as young people but also greater employment opportunities and greater educational opportunities. These people from 15 to 24 will get into the workforce, spend some time in the primary resource market, and then return to university, postsecondary education where they get better educated and subsequently have better lifestyles where they're not subject to the abuse that is being addressed at this conference held in Banff.

MR. JOHNSON: Finally, Mr. Speaker, once again to the Minister of Community Development: what benefits can this Banff international conference bring to Albertans?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I see three very distinct benefits. First of all, AADAC will have the opportunity through the conference to learn about treatment programs and what is occurring in other countries.

I think perhaps where I see the most unique and positive part of this conference is the opportunity for youth to discuss these issues among themselves without being judged. They can speak honestly and frankly about the problems that may be there in their social environment, in their families, peer pressures, whatever.

The third one is the understanding I have that there will be a handbook developed from this conference, and I would expect that AADAC would use it. However, Mr. Speaker, if you would permit us, I would like to ask the chairman of AADAC if she has any further comments. No?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we've spent six minutes with respect to that series of questions, and that's almost double what was spent in three others before that. So we're going to move on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Seniors' Programs

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are almost 10,000 more seniors in Alberta than there were last year. Last year the average amount of financial assistance to seniors was \$636 per senior. This year the government is proposing a cut of 2.5 percent to \$621 per senior. My questions today are to the minister responsible for seniors. Does this per capita cut in financial assistance mean that fewer seniors will be eligible for financial assistance, or are all income thresholds being raised? Which one is it?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'll ask for your guidance on this. I will remind the hon. member that we can have a very thorough discussion of this as early as tomorrow evening in estimates. However, I will also inform the hon. member that to the best of my knowledge, we have not changed the income thresholds in this province, but I welcome him to debate this whole issue.

I will point out to the hon. member again that, yes, he is right; there are more seniors in this province. I will also remind him that part of that is from a huge in-migration of seniors to this province. That would suggest to me and I think to most people that Alberta is the preferred place for seniors to live, in programs and in tax advantage and in cost of living.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, how can the minister just sit back and study this matter knowing that seniors face higher phone rates, higher bus pass prices, huge rent increases, and higher food prices?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think that when the hon. member in his preamble referred to studying the problem, he's referring to an action that we are taking which I should think would be most proactive. We know that the numbers of seniors – the population is aging at a very rapid rate, and we're taking the very proactive activity of reviewing what impact that will have out into the future of programs so that we are positioned as we are today to meet our seniors' needs.

I will remind the hon. member again that when you compare seniors' programs, just seniors' programs, to every other province in Canada, we have the better programs. In fact in many cases we have the only programs in allied health services. We have some of the lowest long-term care costs in Canada in this province. I would also remind them that we have the best tax advantage for people in this province. We have no sales tax in this province. Seniors clearly find Alberta the best place in Canada to live.

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

2:20 Crimes Compensation Board

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A dentist recommended by the Crimes Compensation Board submitted a very unusual treatment for one of my constituents, extracting several of his teeth without replacing them. This dentist concluded in his report that he does not think his report will make my constituent very happy, but then this is why the government pays him the big bucks. My question today is to the Minister of Justice. How much do dentists get paid for examining victims of violent crimes?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of the Assembly I'd like to express our sympathy to the victim for the extensive injuries he received as a result of this incident.

This government considers victims of crime to be a high priority within the justice system. As you know, the proclamation of the Victims of Crime Act occurred just last year, and we have placed additional resources and focus in that area. This particular case being referred to was addressed by the Crimes Compensation Board prior to proclamation of the Victims of Crime Act. Respecting the specific dental fees, the former board would pay \$35 for dental reports, which included a description of the injuries, proposed treatment, and estimated cost of treatment. The new financial benefits program under the Victims of Crime Act now pays \$100 for a similar report.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next question is also to the same minister. When there are conflicts in medical advice, what is the procedure for the Crimes Compensation Board to handle such situations?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, the former board had the authority to adopt any procedure and base its decision on any information it deemed appropriate to a case. The board's autonomy under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act did not permit department intervention at any stage in the process. However, the new financial benefits program bases its awards on the severity of injury as opposed to treatment cost, and treatment options are now available at the discretion of the victim.

The new program addresses many of the inconsistencies in injury assessment by obtaining a third-party opinion and seeking

a consistent assessment. Overall, it is hoped that these improvements will better assist victims of crime when we're dealing with their injuries.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Is it the Crime Compensation Board's policy to extract teeth from victims without replacing them, and how could such a thing happen?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. Since proclamation of the Victims of Crime Act significant changes have come about. I just described some of them in my previous answer.

The new program provides an award sufficient to recognize loss, and beyond that the new program clearly provides for the victim to obtain suitable treatment. Insofar as the specific case mentioned by the hon. member, the director of the victims of crime financial benefits program will contact the victim directly. The victim does have the authority to address the specific concern, and I assure the member that this issue will be resolved to the victim's satisfaction.

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

Well Site Reclamation

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, Alberta Environmental Protection is proposing to issue reclamation certificates for well sites without a field inspection. Only a small percentage of these sites will ever be audited. Even with the current system of field inspections there are some companies that fill out site assessment reports that are incorrect. The farmers and landowners I met with have these questions for the Minister of Environmental Protection. How will the proposed system prevent even more cases of noncompliance occurring? You're not going to catch these guys with a few spot audits.

MR. LUND: The new system that we're looking at will in fact see a minimum of 20 percent of the sites visited and audited. More importantly, Mr. Speaker, every site will require that someone that is accredited to do this type of work will have to sign-off on the report that is sent in to our department.

Also, we are working on the standards. We're taking a lot of the art out of the standards so that, in fact, the process is much more measurable, so that we will be able, by looking at the report, to determine whether things have been done properly.

Furthermore, we are looking at how we can increase the penalty if there is an infraction. In other words, if someone sends in that a site has been reclaimed to our standards and we find out that it hasn't, there will be a severe penalty attached to it, plus they will have to go back and do it properly.

MS CARLSON: You've got to catch them first, Mr. Speaker.

The 200 people I met with want to know what value there is in a reclamation certificate that is not backed by an inspection. Farmers can't take that to the bank when they're trying to sell their land.

MR. LUND: The criteria are there. It will actually be tougher than the criteria that we have today, because today there's a lot of art connected with deciding whether a site meets the criteria. We're trying to remove that so it's very measurable what in fact is being done. Furthermore, we are working with APEGGA so

that it's an engineer that signs off on this, and the farmer, the landowner, the person that is more directly affected will also be signing off. If the farmer disagrees, we will do a site investigation, plus we are looking at extending the ability to appeal beyond one year from the time of reclamation. We're looking at extending that to five years.

MS CARLSON: It's only practical if they fill out the form correctly in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, is this minister saying now, here with the statement he just made, that he's going to direct his department to do on-site inspections, if requested, at no cost to the landowner? Are we going to see that happen in the future?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, there will not be a cost to the landowner. There is not a cost today to the landowner, and there will not be in the future. Also, the hon. member undoubtedly doesn't know that we have been doing this in the green area as a pilot project. In fact, the compliance has gone up.

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

Support For Municipalities

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to be an MLA representing the city of Calgary. On behalf of my colleagues I'm very concerned about the issues with respect to growth that we're experiencing in our city. Our city council, our Airport Authority, a number of organizations such as our chamber of commerce have raised the issue of our grants to the city of Calgary. I'm pleased that our Provincial Treasurer met with Mayor Duerr privately on Friday afternoon. The mayor is very frustrated by what he perceives as a lack of attention being paid to this growth. I have three aldermen whose wards I represent in my community. My question this afternoon is to the Provincial Treasurer. What commitments has the Treasurer made to the mayor following his meeting on Friday?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, it was an informal meeting. It was a very positive meeting. It's part of the ongoing process of MLAs meeting with those for whom and with whom they have a responsibility. Calgary MLAs have certainly been bringing concerns related to growth and pressures on the city of Calgary to the table. In the discussion with the mayor I can tell you that the ongoing commitment to be working closely is firmly established, and that will lead into some specific follow-up with individual MLAs and ministers responsible for certain areas.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Provincial Treasurer: as the infrastructure grant money increase did not seem sufficient to meet the city of Calgary's needs, did the Treasurer give him a commitment to increase the funding over what he has been budgeted?

MR. DAY: The commitment, Mr. Speaker, is that all members are working on growth-related pressures. There was not a clear commitment that there's going to be an automatic grant increase to the city of Calgary, but certainly there is a commitment that ongoing initiatives should be sought for. There was certainly an understanding that growth pressures are good pressures. It's far better to deal with the problems of growth than the problems of shrinkage. It's far better to deal with the problems of people

moving into our province and into our municipalities than people moving out of those particular municipalities. Those discussions will continue.

MRS. BURGNER: My final supplemental. For future dialogues is there any co-ordination planned between Municipal Affairs, the city of Calgary, and the Treasurer in order to resolve this issue?

2:30

MR. DAY: Actually on that specific issue, Mr. Speaker, Treasury officials and officials from Municipal Affairs are working closely and will continue to do so with officials from the city of Calgary to make sure that there's an understanding of what the pressures are, what that relates to in dollars and cents. Also, by that kind of communication, we're able to have a view brought to the table of what's going on all around the province, where there is significant growth in all our municipalities, which is positive but does require a lot of communication and a lot of collaboration so that we can truly continue to benefit from the tremendous growth that Alberta's undergoing right now.

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

Gambling

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's gambling conference showed that Alberta exploits its own people worse than Nevada. The conference highlighted the fact that the VLT destroys families and communities. Now the RCMP is warning the government of the negative costs of VLTs. To the Premier: what will the Premier do to change the fact that Alberta brings in more gambling money than Nevada?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I read that in the newspaper, and I was absolutely astounded. You know, I understand that Albertans alone spend about \$2 billion a year in the state of Nevada, I would suspect primarily in Las Vegas and perhaps Reno. The province of Alberta alone. The casinos of Nevada are not built on winners; they're built on losers. A lot of people go down there to gamble.

Mr. Speaker, I had to check that out because I just found that figure to be absolutely astounding. Here's the key point. The state of Nevada earns most of its gambling revenues from licence fees and taxes. Taxes. There's no state tax in the state of Nevada. But there are sales taxes, there are room taxes, and literally millions and millions of people go there every year to gamble. The proceeds from gambling, unlike Alberta, go to the private sector. This is strictly for-profit gambling, whereas in Alberta the government receives all revenue from electronic gaming and ticket lottery sales after the prize payouts. This money is then returned to the people of Alberta through grants to nonprofit agencies – that's the truth – foundations and community groups. Revenues are also transferred to the general revenue fund to support important government programs like health, education, social services, and debt paydown. In Alberta all revenues after expenses and prize payouts from bingos, casinos, and raffles are returned directly to the charities. The government receives only a small licensing fee and from those activities receives none of the proceeds from gambling.

Mr. Speaker, let's make it quite clear here. We are comparing apples and oranges. Nevada is big-time for-profit gambling. If you got rid of all the casinos in Nevada, I can tell you what

Nevada would be today. It would be what it was a hundred years ago: a desert.

MR. GIBBONS: To the Premier: what guarantee is it that your gambling summit will not be ignored like the Growth Summit?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the Growth Summit was not ignored. All you've got to do is look at the budget and see where our priorities were placed. Certainly the priorities were placed on education and health care, infrastructure. Taxation was identified as one of the priorities, quality of life, jobs and the economy. We didn't ignore the recommendations of the Growth Summit at all, nor will we ignore the outcome and the input that is provided at the summit on gambling.

Mr. Speaker, the exercise at the University of Alberta over last week was a good exercise. Indeed, there were three of our MLAs there, we had officials from AADAC, and we had officials from the Gaming and Liquor Commission. That will all be assessed, and it will all be part of the review of the Gordon report. We have given an undertaking to have that review done by the end of August. That was one of the key recommendations in the report, and we've accepted that recommendation. So all of this input will be part of that review process.

MR. GIBBONS: Then why won't the Premier do the right and honourable thing and hold a provincewide plebiscite? Let Albertans decide.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I go back to the Liberal positions on this issue. You know, the last election it was: phase them out in three years. In other words, if they're that addictive, phase them out in three years. Then, the next position was: Mr. Premier, with the stroke of a pen, get rid of them. Now their third position. You know, we'll ask them tomorrow what their position is – it might change tomorrow; who knows? – but today's position is: have a provincewide plebiscite.

Mr. Speaker, the policy now that was developed in consultation with the municipalities, in consultation with Albertans, municipalities saying: let us decide; let community standards prevail. But the whole policy is being reviewed. That's what the exercise was about at the university. We'll take that into consideration. We'll do our own internal reviews. That's what the summit will be all about in late April, to get good, solid, factual information. Factual information, not Liberal information.

Speaker's Ruling Provoking Debate

THE SPEAKER: I don't know if anybody wanted to raise a point of order, but you know, questions in question period are not supposed to provoke debate, but if the questions do lead, then you do have an exchange back and forth.

So we're going to proceed now with the hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been more than two months since the Kyoto conference on climatic change concluded. With the challenging of the emission reduction target for Canada, my question today is to the Minister of Energy. Would he please tell this House what he is doing to address the reality of the targets and ensure that Albertans will have a say in something that'll affect their every way of life?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that Kyoto has been totally, perhaps misrepresented by certain groups. I'll tell you what we're doing. It follows on what the hon. Henry Kroeger, a representative in this House years ago, said to me: Steve, when you go forward, one of the key things you'll learn as you represent Albertans is to listen, listen, and listen. I wish the federal Liberals when they'd gone to Kyoto had listened, listened, and listened. If they had, it would have made our job a lot easier in explaining Kyoto to the people of Canada, as well as giving them a transparent understanding of what the future means post-Kyoto.

What we've done here is put together a task force. The Premier has asked us to set one up. It will be led by the Member for Fort McMurray, as well as myself, the Minister of Environmental Protection, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. Again, this task force will be charged with listening to Albertans and stakeholder groups.

MR. STRANG: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is to the Minister of Energy. What is the scope of the task force?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I think that this question, although it sounds ambiguous, is the actual issue that should have been presented to Canadians and Albertans before Kyoto: what is the dimension and scope of truth to the Kyoto effort? In Canada we represent 2 percent of the emissions. Compare that to 18 percent in China. In Canada the representative oil and gas industries and other industries, transportation, and our normal living are split about a third each as to contribution. That means that cars and trucks contribute a third of the CO₂, industry a third, and your living means a third.

2:40

So the scope of this task force is to look at the broad spectrum of what's going to happen post-Kyoto to each and every one of us. It will look at transportation and the effect on that. It'll look at your houses, your electricity utilization, your furnaces, your use of hot water heaters, the insulation in your home, new housing standards. It will look at the oil and gas industry and what they have to do. It'll look at research and development. It'll look at the actual ways that we conduct ourselves each and every day as it relates to our living standards, and that may be getting rid of your new expedition.

MR. STRANG: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. Will he clarify all the responsibilities of this task force, all of them?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, one of the key elements of this task force is to, again, listen to Albertans and stakeholders – industry and consumer groups – but, also, the other area is to communicate with the federal government and the other provinces on a process that will bring us together to focus Canadians and Albertans on the issues that need to be looked at.

I'm going to table today the terms of reference that were put out by this cabinet committee on climate change. It covers a cross section of responsibilities from looking at the legal positions that have to be taken as they relate to certain constitutional protections of our energy and oil and gas reserves to also looking at the consultation process with the federal government. It also says that one of the responsibilities is to look at the environmental risks and the benefits of greenhouse reduction and its measures.

One of the other key responsibilities is to understand the science, and that's as complex as the issue itself, being of a global nature. I think that as the member and the rest of the members of the Assembly look at the terms of reference, they'll fully understand the responsibilities of this task force.

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

Forest Management

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta forest conservation strategy was submitted to this government last May. The strategy outlined how our forests can be managed sustainably. It's the result of a consensus between industry, the public, and government which included some 800 participants and thousands of hours of hard work. The questions are to the Minister of Environmental Protection. Why, Mr. Minister, has the strategy yet to be approved?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the Forest Legacy document is being approved as we speak and will be going to the printer very, very shortly.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Minister, was that the Forest Legacy report, or was that actually the response to this report?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the forest conservation strategy that the hon. member refers to was the process that we went through gathering public information. All of the communities that have forest-based industry within their communities were invited to participate. A number of them did, and they worked through the whole process. The name of the document that is finally coming out is the Forest Legacy document.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will that report include a portion, one of the fundamental strategies in the report, on setting aside land as benchmark ecosystems that exclude industrial development and other activities that disturb the land so as to measure the effects of changes in the ecosystem?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the forest conservation strategy and the Forest Legacy document are complementary to the Special Places 2000 program. The program that the hon. member is referring to is the Special Places 2000 program, where we're looking at the protection of ecosystems under the endangered spaces program.

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

Seniors Health Care

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Health. A number of my constituents are concerned about the effects of Alberta's aging population, either because they're seniors themselves or they're concerned about their parents. I would like to ask: what assurances does the minister give Albertans who are concerned about the level of care that they or their parents will receive as they become older?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to indicate that in a general sense I think it is part of the success of our health

care system and, I think, other advantages of living in Canada and Alberta that we are fortunate enough to have a larger older population in this province. That of course, though, does present additional needs as far as the health care system is concerned, and thus far, in the last number of years, we have increased the relative emphasis and expenditure of dollars in our health budget on home care and long-term care and a number of other programs related to seniors.

Knowing that in this province we share, Mr. Speaker, along with all parts of Canada the need to plan for and to anticipate the needs that there will be in the area of health care, we have established a long-term care review committee in Alberta Health with some very, I think, knowledgeable and energetic members on it. It's chaired by the MLA for Redwater. There they will be looking at some of the key areas such as improving our long-term care and home care services in this province, also looking at the needs with respect to pharmaceutical coverage, the whole area of different models of providing professional services. These are some of the things that are part of that review.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Given that seniors' benefits affect Community Development and Municipal Affairs also, what priority areas will the long-term care review committee be focusing on?

MR. JONSON: Well, as I've indicated, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the review being undertaken through Health, we're going to be concentrating on home care and long-term care, the overall accommodation policy for seniors, the pharmaceutical coverage programs, as I said, and the overall area of health care support for seniors.

Also parallel to our effort and in co-operation among the three departments, reviews are being undertaken with respect to housing and accommodation matters through Municipal Affairs and with respect to income support through the Minister of Community Development.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. My final question is also to the Minister of Health. Will Albertans have to wait over a year until the report comes out, or will the minister act on recommendations that are identified by the committee in the short term?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in working with the committee, we have identified a number of areas that should be dealt with in the short term. The direct answer to the hon. member's question is no. I do not intend to wait or to delay two years to take necessary actions where there are recommendations and needs specifically identified. However, we also do need to take the long-term view. This is a trend which will extend for decades to come, we hope, in terms of there being a longer living and healthier seniors population. Therefore, we are doing some long-term planning.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding to Orders of the Day, there was an intervention with respect to one purported point of order. There was a second intervention by the chair with respect to a second purported point of order.

Hon. Opposition House Leader, do you have anything further that you want to add in raising the point of order, or did we deal with it as a result of my intervention?

**Point of Order
Factual Accuracy**

MR. SAPERS: No, Mr. Speaker. I was actually raising a point

of order pursuant to Standing Order 23. It had to do with the Premier's response during question period in the exchange with my colleague from Edmonton-Manning, in which the Premier did use language that was provocative and that was in particular misrepresenting the Alberta Liberal position on VLTs. That position is crystal clear, and it stands in stark contrast to that of the government, which doesn't have a clear position. I think that the Premier should come into the Assembly and make it clear to Albertans that he misconstrued and twisted the Alberta Liberal position, which was before the election, that an Alberta Liberal government would pull the plug on VLTs in this province. Since the government doesn't have the courage to do that, the Alberta Liberal position now is to have a provincewide referendum that the government would find binding upon itself. Perfectly consistent positions. I think the Premier knows that, and he should stop twisting that particular truth.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs on this purported point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, once again we see something which you alluded to in a letter which you sent to House leaders earlier on: that points of order should not be used to simply expand upon the debate that happens earlier in the House. The opposition leader has taken the opportunity again this afternoon under a purported point of order to continue a discussion which started during question period. It was a matter of debate. He continued the debate. He has again, using the purported point of order, outlined their position. Clearly everybody is now elucidated, and that's as far as it should go.

THE SPEAKER: The chair would tend to agree that this purported point of order was just an extension of debate, and I'm sure it'll come back again.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Provincial Fiscal Policies

16. Mr. Day moved:

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

[Adjourned debate February 17: Mr. Mitchell]

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several points that I'd like to make before I relinquish the floor on this debate in response to the budget. I had spent some time in my earlier comments talking about the fact that this budget is truly a budget that promotes money first and people second. I demonstrated the neglect of people in a number of different areas, most notably health care, education, poverty, the manner in which tax cuts have been implemented which move more and more from a progressive system to a regressive system, hurting poor people more, of course, in the process.

I didn't speak extensively enough about the effect and impact of this budget or its neglect on women or issues that affect women in particular more than they affect men. Health care is an area which falls into this category as a priority. One clear consequence of the cutbacks to the health care system is that more and more people are being discharged earlier from hospitals. They

are therefore sicker when they come home. Many people who at one time would have been a certainty for admission to a hospital due to the level of their ailment, injury, or sickness now remain home in the first place.

Who picks up that pressure? Well, it isn't the home care system, which is still grossly underfunded with huge waiting lists, waiting lists that have increased significantly over the levels of 1992 or '93, when the cuts began. Instead, in fact it is more often than not a woman who picks up that slack, either a mother or a sister or a wife or a niece or a daughter who picks up the slack that's caused, if I can use that term, because this government has cut back in a way that has meant more people, sicker people spend more time at home trying to recover and perhaps a longer time than they would have had they had better hospital care or the better care that they would have received in a hospital. One obvious solution to this, which many of us hopefully anticipated would be in the budget, would be significantly improved home care, but there is no commitment to that, Mr. Speaker.

There was also the question that women, of course, have particular health care needs and requirements which are particularly complex at the emotional and physical levels, and it's very interesting and unfortunate to note that no further commitment was made to women's health centres and that nothing has been done of significance to recover from or make up for the closure of the women's health centre here in Edmonton.

Breast screening was a topic of debate today in the Legislature during question period. The question of mammography and its status in Canada and in Alberta is current and public at this time.

MR. YANKOWSKY: What about prostate?

MR. MITCHELL: The Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview says: what about prostate? We could walk and chew gum at the same time, Julius; you know, we could do both those things if you'd actually chosen to be part of a government that could understand how to do that. It's not a trade-off, Julius. Men and women can work together side by side, respect one another equally. Maybe you should learn that.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, we see now maybe some of the enlightened quote, unquote, input that this caucus has received on the topics of proper breast screening and women's health care and that it's pretty limited in its view if the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has had any significant input into his caucus, although I doubt that they'll listen.

MS CARLSON: Nobody disagrees with you.

MR. MITCHELL: Nobody's defending him.

Breast screening, mammography, is an issue. Women know it's an issue. It is an issue, Mr. Speaker, because a recent study of Canada Health has indicated that over 50 percent of mammography facilities in Canada are substandard. Today we were told by the Minister of Health that Alberta's levels are higher than that. At what level does he think it's good enough? So only 40 percent of Alberta's mammography clinics are below standard, or is it 30 percent or 20 percent or 15 percent? Higher has a long way to go before it's good enough, and what we'd like to see is the Minister of Health make a commitment to tabling that information in the House, not just talk about it, not just talk about it in broad brushes, but table it in the House in a way that women can have some confidence in the kind of mammography services that are

available to them, in a way that gives them a chance to evaluate the services relatively and to therefore make a choice about where they would get the best service. I would appreciate the minister at some point in the next couple of days tabling that information and saying: "Here. Here it is. We're doing better than the rest of Canada." Hopefully, he'd be able to say that we're doing well enough. I doubt it very, very much.

What's happening, one of the consequences, is that women are afraid now about the services they may receive for one of the most terrifying diseases that, I'm told, a woman can experience. They are not only afraid that they are not getting quality care at mammography facilities but that they are not getting safe care and that levels of X rays are frequently exceeding the safety standard that should be imposed, sustained, and monitored for them across this province. In fact, a recent survey has shown that in Alberta 60 percent of the equipment or film processing for this service was defective. In fact a number of these machines related to this service have shown abnormally high levels of radiation. This is not a surprise, given that this equipment is aging and has aged to a point where replacement is probably very, very necessary.

Another issue that is a health issue affecting women is the emergence and the observation of greater and greater mental health problems due to perhaps social pressures, the kinds of economic pressures that are felt particularly by women under a government that has cut services to people. Many of these services are of particular need in support of women for many, many reasons. One of the reasons is that when homes break up, it is standard practice that the woman's and often the children's standard of living is diminished significantly while the man's standard of living is increased significantly, by 73 percent, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, a recent study by the provincial mental health council has indicated that a significant percentage of those people, women included, who approach MLA offices in fact are suffering in some way or another a mental health problem. I also want to point out the conclusion by this group and its study: that more and more women with mental health problems are using the food banks. I bet you that any investigation would point out that more and more women who are homeless are homeless because they have mental health problems and have nowhere else to go and have no support. A people-focused budget would be very, very concerned about these things and wouldn't try and pit men against women, as the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did, to justify not doing enough for women.

3:00

There is also, Mr. Speaker, a lack of women's voices in policy-making and program design not only in health but across this province. Some years ago, when I was elected to the Legislature my first term, an effort was made to establish the women's advisory committee and the women's council. Certainly one is gone, and the other certainly hasn't been supported in the way that it should. It was a great idea, both of them. One of the great premises that supported those ideas was that women would have better input into policy-making in areas that they had traditionally been excluded from and that legislation and government policies would be run through the screening of how these policies would affect women differently than they would affect men. That served a great social purpose. That purpose is not being served any longer. This budget could have addressed that.

Midwifery. Here's a classic case I think, Mr. Speaker, of where the government wants to take credit for a good idea, midwifery, does a lot of posturing in order to take that credit but

really doesn't deliver. They will stand up in this House and say that \$800,000 is going into midwifery over the next three years across this province. It could, but the RHAs of course turned it down because they understand what the consequences really are. One, it's policy-making by 17 different regional health authorities, which means you begin to balkanize an already more increasingly balkanized health care system. You'll get 17 different standards of health care. You'll have 17 different groups reinventing the wheel about how to administer and apply and monitor midwifery.

Secondly, they understand that when it's all broken out, they each would get \$15,000 a year for three years to do all the things that would have to be done to set up a proper midwifery program, which could in fact save health care dollars and provide better health care services to women, more comfortable health care services to women. It's a win/win circumstance, but because this Treasurer and his Health minister can't understand that this can be done properly and how it might be done properly, again, it's gone and it's lost. Of course they're happy because they save \$800,000 and don't have to say that it's their fault. They can say that the RHAs, which couldn't have used it properly – and they understand it – didn't take it. It's a question of who's going to take responsibility, and what we don't see, Mr. Speaker, in this budget is anybody particularly taking responsibility for women's health and other issues.

One of the most glaring and evident omissions from this budget is the question of family violence and what could be done about that. We got our hopes up a couple of years ago when the government supported Bill 214, presented by former Liberal member Alice Hanson. It was all but if not in fact unanimously supported in the House, and it was because it was an excellent idea. It was because there was public scrutiny and public exposure of anybody on that side of the House who might have determined to vote against it. They were afraid to. What they did is they used in fact a tricky procedural manoeuvre to get it off the table.

Promises were made by the Member for Calgary-Currie that it would come back, that she would make certain. I heard it on the radio. I was driving through rural Alberta. I remember the day, a sunny, bright day. She said that it will come back, Mr. Speaker, and it hasn't come back. Maybe it will. Maybe it will come back tomorrow or in three weeks or the fall session or next year. But how many women would have been helped, how much family violence would have been reduced, how many children would have been helped, and how many deaths would have been prevented had that bill been passed when we had the chance to pass it or had it been brought in at the earliest possible time, consistent with what the Member for Calgary-Currie said right on radio, that it'll be back? We keep hearing that it's going to be back. Is it going to be back in this millennium, or is it going to be back in the next millennium? It's time to get it back. I know you're not surrounded by people who would actually support it, but it's time to get it back, Calgary-Currie. Let's bring it in. The person on your right probably won't support it, not unless we can reciprocate for men, I guess.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MRS. BURGNER: Section 23(h), (i), and (j): imputing false motives. I just would like the hon. member to know that in

developing the legislation for family violence, all members were asked to submit interests and comments, and the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview did that with a great deal of intensity and clear thought. I'm very pleased that when the bill is brought forward, it will reflect some of those comments. I think it's inappropriate to suggest that my colleague is incapable of recognizing the seriousness of family violence.

MR. MITCHELL: I'd like to address that point of order. I'm very happy that the member has clarified that.

I wonder if she could clarify something else, which would be related to that point of order, and that is: exactly when is she going to table it in the House?

THE SPEAKER: The matter we have before the House right now is a review of Government Motion 16. This is not a question-and-answer period.

So perhaps, hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, you would like to continue.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to make my point, and I stand corrected.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Not unrelated to this is the issue of women's shelters. If the Member for Calgary-Currie was really concerned about this issue of family violence, perhaps she and others could be supporting greater funding for women's shelters, which consistently turn away women and families. That funding has been kept inordinately low because of the way they account for the number of beds and their usage.

In fact, it's appalling but true that this government will say that there are empty beds on a given night or throughout the year. You know why they say that they would be empty? Because there may be three beds and a crib in one room but only a mother and two children, so there's a bed free that night. I suppose they could have brought in somebody from some other family to use that bed, but of course they wouldn't, and that gets counted as an extra bed. It's the most deceitful way to justify something that's fundamentally wrong. Why can't they just account for it properly and then put some real money, one, into supporting them properly and, two, into doing the counseling, the preventative work, and the post work, the problem work, to deal with the problems and get them fixed?

You know, there are a lot of very comfortable MLAs in this House across there. They can go home at night to their loving families and their wonderful homes and their wonderful children, and it's very easy to block out just how other people live and our responsibility to those other people. They don't all live like that. Those shelters can be an assistance to many more people who need it desperately, and they're left without that. We can laugh about it. Calgary-Currie, you can laugh about it, but perhaps you should take some responsibility for it.

The question of day care, again, is an issue that faces women particularly, because to this point in our society women take more responsibility generally for child care than men do. The fact is that it's going to get worse. Cutting subsidies the way that that has been done is going to hurt children and is going to hurt women in particular, who take a particular responsibility for raising children.

With respect to advanced education, yes, increasing tuitions are a burden for all students, but I would wager they are particularly

a burden for female students for two reasons. One is because women tend to get lower paying jobs during the summers because the market is different for them. It's a reality; we have to acknowledge it. So they have less resources, less access to resources to pay for those higher tuitions. Secondly, some of the people who most need a chance, a second chance or a first chance, at an education to dig their way out of a circumstance that often wasn't of their making are single mothers. Tell me how many single mothers in this province have easy access to post-secondary institutions in the first place, let alone with ever increasing tuitions.

What I feel, Mr. Speaker, very deeply is that, yes, there is a budget here but that it is very, very superficially thought out, that its premises are about a mile wide and a quarter of an inch thick, and that they haven't really thought about the consequences of what they've done and, more importantly, what they haven't done for the people of this province.

3:10

I'm getting very, very disturbed at an emerging and sustained philosophy, almost sustained in every document we see from the government, and that is – they would use these words; in fact the member from Medicine Hat did once – every man for themselves, forgetting that 52 percent of Albertans are actually women and forgetting that in fact Alberta was never built on any kind of premise that it was everyone for themselves, ever, ever, ever. The logical conclusion of that philosophy is that somehow every individual Albertan built their little bit of Alberta all by themselves and that they're entitled to it and that they're going to stand and defend it. That isn't true, and Albertans don't believe it, except perhaps the ones that formulate policy in this government.

The strength of Alberta has been, yes, rugged individualism but never selfish rugged individualism. Always a sense of the collective, always a sense of the community, always a sense of: what is my responsibility, given that I am so fortunate, for other people in my community who simply are not as fortunate? Where does that responsibility start, and where does it end? Those are questions that used to be at the heart of debates in this Legislature and used to be the premise of even earlier Conservative budgets under Peter Lougheed, who was an enlightened man and an enlightened leader. Oh, that we should have that legacy or something approaching it even. Certainly I don't agree with him, but it was certainly enlightened compared to what we see today, and I think we have to get back to some of that sense. You can talk about it. They can talk about family values and they can talk about these sweeping higher ideals, but when the rubber hits the road in a budget, you know what they mean and you know what they don't mean. And what they don't mean, Mr. Speaker, is people first; they mean money first.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to summarize. I'm going to say that this is a money first, people second budget. This is not a budget that should properly be called Agenda for Opportunity. This is a budget that should properly be called an agenda for missed opportunity. Alberta has been brought to a state where in fact there is a good deal of fiscal stability and strength in government, and that is an accomplishment. But that accomplishment isn't just an end in itself. Surely everything that Albertans have been asked to go through in the last four years in this province wasn't to bring us to that as the pinnacle of achievement. Surely that achievement is merely a means to an end to create a stronger, better, more decent, more civil, more dignified society where people can truly realize their potential and realize opportunities, not just in a fiscal sense but in a value-based sense that goes well beyond that.

Instead, Mr. Speaker, not only is this an agenda for missed opportunities, but this budget is an agenda for people missed. And they have missed; believe me, they have missed. They have missed the students in oversized classrooms. They have missed the students who are trying to get into universities and colleges but simply cannot afford it. They have missed the students who are struggling to stay in those institutions but are leaving with \$25,000 and \$30,000 mortgage-size student loans. They have missed the women that are picking up the burden of the health care system. They have missed the seniors who suffer particularly from the long waiting lists and the hips that aren't being replaced. They have missed the children who need hot lunch programs. They have missed the less fortunate children who need the Head Start program. They have missed the special-needs children in our schools. They have missed the 135,000 children who live in poverty. They have missed the children who live in poverty in Edmonton, which has one of the highest rates of urban poverty in the entire country. They have missed what they could do to properly monitor and assess and protect the environment. They have missed the people who are gambling, driven by addictions because of video slot machines.

Most of everything that they have missed, Mr. Speaker, are people. They haven't missed tax cuts. They haven't missed paying off the debt at all. They haven't even relinquished on that minimally so that they could help people. But they have in fact missed people.

What state are we in now in this province? Well, we've got health care and education funding that simply does not even keep up with the status quo, that will barely if at all keep up with the increases in population and the increases in student numbers and won't keep up with the depreciation in health care facilities and the lack of funding for nurses and doctors and others. They have the Edmonton public school board teachers on the verge of a strike. They have doctors on the verge of job action. They have both the biggest universities in this province raising their fees yet again just to keep abreast of cost increases and population increases, not even allowing them to maintain or sustain achieved higher levels of educational excellence. This government has been clearly accused by people who were generally on their side of having been betrayed. I'm talking about municipal authorities, who have played the game, who have co-operated, and who have not received the money to fix the roads, that they are subsidizing the rest of the province for.

We have a province that has become more dependent on gambling revenues than the state of Nevada. We have a province that is now raising more money from gambling than they raise from crude oil royalties, Mr. Speaker. What an achievement. We have waiting lists in health care and red alerts, that the Minister of Health simply won't believe. What we have is a government that has put its head in the sand and will not understand, one, that problems exist, two, that they created many of these problems and, three, that by omission they are not making an effort to fix the problems that it is government's responsibility to fix.

Two huge glaring omissions, Mr. Speaker, in this one. One is the problem that arises when you get sloganeering politics and sloganeering government policy-making, and that is: it's only an expense problem; it's only an expenditure problem. Well, it was that because they weren't managing expenditures then, and by the way, they're not managing them now. It is also a revenue instability problem, and that hasn't been addressed. That hasn't been fixed by this government but only by our suggestion of a stability fund where we would take some of the surplus funds and put them into a fund that could be drawn down for short periods

of time to buffer sudden drops in revenues to this province's coffers.

The other glaring but very revealing omission or statement in this budget was a tax cut, a 22-cent-a-day tax cut, a personal income tax cut where if you waited five days, you might be able to buy another cup of coffee, and if you waited two weeks, you might actually be able to buy a cappuccino, a latte.

What happened with this is that this tax cut now contributes to the government's assertion that they have reduced business and personal income taxes to Albertans by \$500 million. What they fail to compare that to – and I'm going to do it here – is that at the same time, they have increased revenues from VLTs, video slot machines, from zero to \$500 million a year over the same period of time. So what you have here is a very clear comparison, which very clearly states, not by words but by this government's actions, where they really come from and reflects where they really come from. They have just reduced the burden on businesses and personal income tax by \$500 million over the last four or five years, and they have paid for that directly through video slot machines, which take money from the poor and the disadvantaged and the addicted, the vulnerable.

If ever there is a legacy that is established, that is sustained, that is reiterated in this budget and that will very likely be the legacy for which this government will be remembered, it is that this government put money first, and when it came to people, they gave advantage to people who were already advantaged, which is okay in and of itself, except that they did that on the backs of people who are disadvantaged and addicted and who are vulnerable and who need our care. Care is not a weak word, and compassion is not a weak word. Those are very strong words, and it should be those words that should be captured in a budget, any budget, any budget that would even remotely begin to reflect what Albertans really are, any budget that would make the people of this province proud of a government that, it's certain, doesn't live up to that kind of aspiration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's assumed that most opposition politicians only have negative things to say about the budget, so I'm going to treat the government members to one or two positive observations about the current budget. I can even give you warning: in about one and a half minutes you might as well just leave the room, because you're not going to want to hear the rest of what I've got to say. [interjection] Oh, thank you, hon. minister.

The first item that I would say is relatively positive is the enrichment of the family employment tax credit. The tax credit was already announced in last year's budget and only reannounced in 1998, but it is a positive measure because it directs tax relief to working families at the lower end of the income scale.

But, you know, Mr. Speaker, I'm always looking for alternatives to government action, and I think I've got a suggestion that would help lower income working families even more, and that would be raising the minimum wage, which as of about six weeks from now will not have been raised in six shameless years. Every other province raises its minimum wage without economic calamity. In fact, usually when it's raised, it provides economic stimulus. It tends to bump up all other earnings. It increases consumer demand and actually promotes business prosperity. But here in Alberta: a shameless record of six years without an

increase in the minimum wage. My guess is that even if you had adjusted it all along to keep pace with inflation and other trends, it would be at least \$7 an hour, maybe even \$7.43 an hour, which is probably what it should be. It's a scandal.

I think that when you look at the history of the budget since 1992 and the fact that we haven't had an increase in the minimum wage since then, you'll see that this neoconservative revolution has caused rapid growth in the number of working poor. I think it's unacceptable that we let employers off the hook and are forced to programs like the family employment tax credit and other programs which I will get to. I suppose – I'm getting to it right now – the extended health and dental benefits for children of working poor families: this is welcome news, although again it's like a taxpayer subsidy to the employers who won't pay more than what they're required by law to pay, which is \$5 an hour.

Some alternatives, though, I would suggest, would be raising the income threshold above \$18,000 to something close to the poverty line for a family of four before benefits end. Secondly, how about amending the employment standards legislation to require prorated benefits for part-time workers, thereby reducing the need for a program like this? Third, consider exempting families who qualify for the program from paying health care premiums. My position is that health care premiums should be eliminated altogether. So far, my calls have fallen upon deaf ears amongst the government benches, so let's just talk about, I guess, the incremental steps that, even if I were a red Tory, I would consider. It would make it simpler for both the families and the government, because you'd only need to administer a single program rather than both the family health program and the health care premium subsidy.

I also think that this budget is as much about failure as it is about success. I think it tells us that the government is a failure when it comes to listening to Albertans. The across-the-board tax cut – big deal. I mean, \$1.92 a week: gee, you know, what are you going to do with all that money? Go and buy a new car? How about renovate your home? I don't think so. Albertans, when polled, were very clear. They weren't interested in minor tax cuts. What they want is for the government to put back money into people services.

I will give you an example. Have a look at the budget here. Family and Social Services: the current estimate of spending is \$1.357 billion. Five years ago the actual came in at \$1.678 billion. So what did this drop of a little over \$300 million accomplish? What it accomplished was making poor people even poorer. What it accomplished was forcing the poorest people in the province to live on maybe \$396 a month – that's to pay for everything; right? I mean the rent, the utilities if they incur them directly, food, transportation – the result of which has been a doubling of the food bank usage in that period of time here in Edmonton.

The Department of Justice in 1992-93 had a budget of \$426 million. We're now looking at a budget of \$384 million. The budget had been as low as \$361 million. Well, no wonder Crown prosecutors say that they're overworked. Hiring the extra Crown prosecutors was just a first step in correcting the problem. You've got clogged courts, clerks freaked at the requests that they're supposed to handle on behalf of judges, and judges thinking: how am I supposed to get through this caseload?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Then there are two more I'd like to compare. Health: this is

the big one. Five years ago the budget for Health was \$4.133 billion. This year it is \$4.206 billion. Now, when you consider population increases, when you consider inflation, when you consider the aging population of our society, I just don't believe it takes a rocket surgeon to figure out that in order to reopen the approximately 50 percent of the hospital beds that were closed in Edmonton in this time of extreme cutbacks, in order to reopen the more than one-third of the hospital beds that were closed in Calgary, you need about an extra \$300 million to \$400 million. Well, I guess it's only the NDP that's prepared to put the actual money tag on this item and say: that's where the money should be. Those beds need to be reopened. Those hospitals that were closed need to be reopened.

But when you examine the severity of the cuts between departments, in fact nowhere, relative to the '92-93 budget compared to the current budget, will you see a greater drop in funding than to municipalities. The Municipal Affairs budget in 1992 was \$836 million. This year it is projected to reach a whopping \$245 million. Now, I'll tell you what that means. It means close to a 70 percent cut – all right? – which is unacceptable, considering the cities have very limited abilities to tax. Basically, they have the ability to maybe make money off their utilities if they still own them, and they have the ability to tax on the basis of properties. Well, there isn't that much difference in the taxation of, for example, a \$100,000 house or a \$200,000 house. There isn't that much.

When I got my tax bill this year, I couldn't believe 52 percent of it going to education. I'm thinking: gee, how many times do I have to pay for education? I pay my basic taxes, my personal taxes. I pay all the hidden taxes. I pay the health care premiums. I pay the GST – oh, yeah, the GST, my real favourite. The one good thing about the GST: you know what it is? It got rid of Brian Mulroney's federal Conservative government. That's the only good thing that that accomplished.

Anyway, you look at municipalities. All of the financial responsibilities are now downloaded on them despite the fact that they don't have any flexibility compared to the provincial government, which collects fees and taxes and \$660 million projected this year just from gambling. So what happens is the city of Edmonton says: oh, we can only afford to pick up your garbage once every two weeks in the winter. By the way, when it snows, get used to the fact that on all your main roads, which are not all one-ways in this city, for probably two to three weeks after a major snowfall you're going to lose at least one lane, maybe two lanes because they don't have the money to go clearing the snow that they have to pile up when they're clearing the main roads. So it's piled up, and it's occupying at least one other lane, often two other lanes. Well, those are real-life problems associated with this government's punitive attitude towards funding of people services.

3:30

To get back to health care. The government says, "Oh, don't worry; we're putting money back in." Well, the cuts were too deep, and I knew that. You know, half the columns I wrote were on health care. While I was out of this Legislature, while the Liberals and the Conservatives were both voting for legislation that would strangle the ability of government to have any flexibility and instead dedicate its complete focus to debt retirement and debt repayment, net debt, nobody could predict that, gee, we might need a little more than the cushion that the government is calling for. By the way, that cushion, if unexpended, also went to debt retirement. You add up the total lies that the government

got away with, and in a four-year period their budgeting was off by \$14.9 billion. That's how much extra money they had compared to what they were projecting or forecasting. That's how much extra money could have been available, even part of it, to maintain the people's services that we pay our taxes for and expect to have maintained.

Aside from the fact that cuts were way too deep and way too fast, let me just highlight one of the things that happened. During the height of the cuts in 1994 the Capital health authority here was forced to close the neurotrauma unit at the Royal Alex hospital and centralize it at the University. They also closed all but two intensive care units in this city. The health care system was overwhelmed as a result of the changes. They're now having to reopen the neurotrauma unit at the Royal Alex, and the ICU at Grey Nuns is being reopened. It cost money to close down these lifesaving facilities, and now money has to be spent again to reopen them. Money was unnecessarily wasted because this government cut health care too deeply.

I might add that to keep the hospital beds open, the ones that got closed, actually doesn't mean that you divide the amount of money that goes to hospitals by the number of beds, because there are lots of fixed, stationary, and expensive costs associated with just having a hospital. All right? So in fact each incremental bed doesn't necessarily equal the cost of all beds when divided by the total amount going to hospitals. It's cheaper and cheaper and cheaper with each bed that you open or reopen.

Now, the health care crisis in Calgary caused by this government's budget cuts is potentially even more serious in the medium to longer term. At least in Edmonton with proper funding we could very easily have five functioning acute care hospitals. In Calgary three hospitals – the General, the Holy Cross, and the Grace – were completely shut down as a result of the budget cuts. A city of more than 800,000 people, Calgary is down to three acute hospitals to service a population growing at the rate of 25,000 per year. This government is squarely to blame. Not only did the government policies close half the hospitals; they closed half the beds as well. This leaves Calgary in a situation where even if the health care system were properly funded, there are hardly any hospitals available to reopen.

So I ask myself: did this happen by accident or design? Well, no wonder the former chief operating officer of the Calgary regional health authority heads a group of investors who want to open up a private hospital. In their business plan HRG says it is needed because of the looming shortage of beds in the public system. One of their principal investors and operators told me that in person, right across the table from me last year. Now, is it any accident that he and many of the people appointed by this government to the Calgary regional health authority board have close Conservative ties? I don't think so. The government seems to be setting up a situation in Calgary where there is no alternative but to turn to private, for-profit hospitals.

Education is in much the same boat. While it's true the government's attempt to increase private-school funding suffered a setback at the Tory convention, the charter schools could pose the same threat to public education. And we still don't have the report that the minister received at least a week ago on the recommendations as to whether or not the government will continue to fund private schools, schools that want your money but don't want to be accountable to you as taxpayers.

The bottom, I would say, was reached in most departments in 1995-96, the third year of the cuts. If inflation is counted, the cuts ranged from 20 to 40 percent. I've given you all the

specifics. We've got a 40 percent drop in Justice, a 70 percent drop in Municipal Affairs. There are other examples as well. So we now have the richest province in Canada providing the worst services to its people, and in every new budget we see cuts continue.

Oh, yes. The \$15 billion lie. It's unbelievable that the government actually got away with saying year after year that we're going to run a deficit and actually ran multibillion dollar surpluses. The administration promised to clean up the books, and to some extent they have. However, the amount of propaganda has gone up, not down. The Auditor General is no longer allowed to put financial information in his reports, so the government can control every detail. Now we get swamped with business plans full of slanted statistics, mission statements, and key performance measures, much of it meaningless and irrelevant. In Education a measure as basic as teacher/student ratios isn't even a key performance measure according to the government. Now, isn't that unbelievable? In the maintenance enforcement program we're told how success should be measured, but no measures are given. Other measures are merely self-serving; that is, other government departments all love the support they get from the Justice department. Now, it's this tight control of information that has allowed the government to get away with, you know, the big lie. The deficit made me do it.

We in the New Democratic Party know that the agenda was and still is an ideological plan to implement a right-wing agenda of downsizing and privatizing regardless of the cost to Albertans, particularly the poorest Albertans. I need no greater proof than the now Minister of Energy going to a conference in Toronto two years ago and bragging about his department, the Municipal Affairs department, having actually lost more than \$2 billion because of its haste to sell off public property. Unbelievable. You know, people are queuing up; parents are working till 3 o'clock in the morning at casinos to try to raise money for a computer in the library or textbooks. This government has cut back so much that they're forced to do this and still be at work at 8 o'clock in the morning, while this minister is down in Toronto bragging about losing more than \$2 billion of assets that belonged to the people of Alberta.

The government claims to be such good financial managers. What happened with the Swan Hills waste treatment fiasco? How about the Husky Oil upgrader? Saskatchewan makes money on its sale of it; we lose hundreds of millions. Boy, are they good managers. What about the Auditor General's criticism of their privatization efforts in deliberately inflating costs so they could, so-called, justify privatizing laundry services, deliberately by a factor of between four and eight? Whew; man oh man.

If this government was prepared to be honest with Albertans, it would give us a straightforward measure of how much investment income we get from the investments so that we can contrast them with the much ballyhooed cost of borrowing. I raised this in question period last week. If the government was really looking after taxpayers' money, they'd sell off our poorest earning assets and pay down some of our more expensive debt. Any accountant can tell you that. If it was really honest with Albertans, they would not put up with a government that makes them live with the poorest services in Canada when we live in the richest province.

I will conclude by saying that it should come as no surprise to the Leader of the Official Opposition that this budget is a reflection of the policy of money first, people second. I ask my Liberal brethren if anything has changed during the years that the NDP wasn't represented in this Legislature. No. It was like that

from 1993 to 1997, and I'm glad that we have at least two members in this Assembly who will speak up for the poor, yes, even those who are on welfare. We have the guts to speak up for the poor as well as for those who are waiting for needed hospital beds as well as for the kids who deserve a lower student/teacher ratio.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview has moved that we adjourn debate on Motion 16. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

Ombudsman Appointment

18. Mr. Havelock moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly confirm the appointment of Gerrald Gwynn Scott Sutton as Ombudsman by order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council effective April 1, 1998, for a term of five years as recommended in the report of the Select Special Ombudsman Search Committee.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to stand and support the motion. I want to take this opportunity to point out a few things about the role of the Ombudsman, which I hope all members of that committee and of this Legislature will take note of.

One of the things that I truly believe should be within the Ombudsman's power would be to investigate health care. I think that would be a good move for an open and accountable government and certainly a good move for the people of Alberta. Maybe we wouldn't be striking up very costly committees that might report in two years, whose report might get shredded.

3:40

MR. MacDONALD: But they get nice cars to drive.

MRS. SOETAERT: They get nice cars to drive while they're doing it, yeah. But that's off topic, and I do want to keep to the issue of the Ombudsman.

I would like to say that I hope that there are enough resources allocated to this role. It's a very important role and one that I think should pay the person what they are worth. In that role they will also need properly financed resources in order to do the homework and to keep the role of the Ombudsman very strong. So he needs support staff, he needs materials, he needs investigative staff. [interjection] No, I don't think he needs a car. However, I do believe that he - he or she; I know it's a he - should be properly reimbursed. I appreciate the work that went

into this committee, but if we want to always continue to get the very best person for the role, I think the Assembly should be courageous enough to pay that person what they are worth.

Actually, an interesting analogy would be: how does the payment of our Ombudsman compare with that of other provinces? Has that been looked into? What research do they do as compared to other provinces?

So I would venture to say that it's a very important role, one that I think we all appreciate in this Assembly, and I certainly can't encourage the government and all members of the Assembly enough to include within that role the ability to look into and to be the Ombudsman for health care, because that is the number one concern in this province. I know all members of this Assembly have heard concerns from constituents, very costly committees set up, and I would venture to say that another staff person for the Ombudsman would do the same job.

So with those words, Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the opportunity. I will be supporting this motion, but I do want the committee and the rest of the Legislative Assembly to know that I would like those two things dealt with. Is that person being properly reimbursed? Does he have the resources to do the job properly? And I think we should consider health care under his domain.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am rising to support Motion 18 today. I think the role of the Ombudsman – and in this case it is a man, so we'll say Ombudsman – is a very important one for Albertans and for the legislators in this Assembly. The Ombudsman does serve as our check and balance against the tyranny of government, and in a just society it allows for levels of appeal that our citizens require and shows us to be open to that kind of appeal. I'm sure most of the people in this Assembly have had constituents come to them who really are in need of the Ombudsman as a final resort in trying to work through their problems or their encounters with government and come to a satisfactory result.

One of the things that I've noticed is that when this government does have a good idea – and I'll grant that it does have them occasionally – they don't seem to fund it properly. I'm really hoping that enough funds are given to this person and their office to support the work of it. I'm wondering: I don't think I'm privy to this information: did we have the resources in place to attract the best and the brightest? I hope we're not in a position where we would have to be looking for someone who's able to subsidize their salary. I think this is an important job, and it should be treated that way.

I'm wondering if we funded the administration and the office of the Ombudsman properly. Can our new Ombudsman concentrate on the task at hand, or are they forced into counting paper clips and monitoring whether they're using both sides of sheets of paper to save money? Are they going to have to be constantly watching their activities to make sure that they don't run out of funds, that they don't go over on a meagre budget? I think that this is certainly happening in a number of agencies and departments in the government. I think that when we're trying to offer a service like the Ombudsman to the Alberta public, it's important that we stand behind it, that we don't make it an empty shell, that we don't make it a slogan.

I'm wondering about the resources that are allocated to this

agency, to the Ombudsman's office. Will they be able to afford a toll-free 1-800 line so that Albertans can call in to their Ombudsman to speak with them? I find that many of the people that call me with concerns where they wish to appeal to the Ombudsman don't have many resources. It's an important tenet to me that we make this office as accessible as possible. Certainly there is experience that tells us what that amount of money can be.

Will this office be staffed well enough to process cases within a reasonable period of time, say, within two weeks for an initial contact to say, yes, we got your letter or, yes, we got your phone call and we're working on it? I'm interested in what the benchmarks would be, the expectations for the time that would elapse before a case has been properly investigated. I'm assuming that every commitment is being made here that there would be proper investigation and time expectations for the results being investigated, the results being given to the constituents, and the case closed. That requires resources.

So I think having an Ombudsman is an honourable thing, and it reflects well on the Legislature. I truly hope that the resources are in place to support this office.

Those are just a few points that I wanted to make in support of this motion, and with that I can conclude my remarks this afternoon.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 1
Protection of Children
Involved in Prostitution Act

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would move that the motion for third reading of Bill 1, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 1, Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, be not now read a third time but be recommitted to Committee of the Whole to enable the committee to consider further amendments to section 3 of the bill.

[Motion carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1
Protection of Children
Involved in Prostitution Act

MR. HANCOCK: I would move that Bill 1 be amended as follows. Section 3 is amended, (a), in subsection (1)(b) by adding "subject to subsection (2)," before "on the child's" and, (b), in subsection (2) by striking out "Notwithstanding section 2(1)(b), if" and substituting "If."

3:50

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. This will be known as amendment A5. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wonder if the minister would explain to us why he's amending this at this stage.

MR. HANCOCK: To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Chairman, there was an error made by a member of the opposition who brought this section forward, and we've been asked to revert because the amendment that was being brought forward . . .

THE CHAIRMAN: Hon. Minister, it seems to me that the Committee of the Whole approved of the amendment and it was further recognized in Assembly. That would be just as an addendum to your explanation as to why we're here.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Just on the amendment?

THE CHAIRMAN: On the amendment, absolutely.

MS OLSEN: Absolutely. Maybe I can clarify this. The issue was brought up on the bill that the section appeared to be inconsistent. It was brought up by a colleague on my side of the House. The amendment was put in by the government members, by the minister, and agreed to. We now accept the rewording again back to the original wording of the bill. We're an extremely co-operative group here, and we just want to see this bill go forward. Hopefully that puts that issue to rest, and we should move on.

[Motion on amendment A5 carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Chairman, I move that the bill be reported when the committee rises and reports.

THE CHAIRMAN: All right. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has moved that this bill be reported when the committee rises and reports. All those in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE CHAIRMAN: Those opposed, please say no. Carried.

Bill 16

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I'm glad to have this opportunity in committee to speak to the supplementary estimates, which include all departments. I appreciate the opportunity to ask questions and to speak to these.

Under the Health estimates what I was very sad to see is that nothing was allocated for boundary accessibility. I would venture to say that as we're having committees set up to look at boundaries, one of the things they should have looked at is accessibility. So I would say that instead of just building little kingdoms around our province, we would be much better if we had open borders and open boundaries, and I saw nothing in the supplementary estimates to allay the concerns of many of my constituents about boundaries and accessibility. I saw nothing about long-term care beds and increased funding for that.

In fact, I was glad to see that a physician fee-for-service pool

was included, and I appreciate that. Especially I remember Redwater not having enough doctors to keep their facility open around the clock, and that's also happened in other areas. That's a concern for me, because the farther away from the larger cities you are, you are vulnerable in those situations when you do need emergency care. If those hospitals are not available, that 20 minutes in a journey can often mean the difference between life and death. So I do appreciate that they are looking at something to properly reimburse physicians, and I would like to see more put into the fact that we need to court doctors into serving some of our isolated areas. They are isolated for a few reasons. Number one, they don't have partners, often, to practise with, and that makes it a lonely type job. It also is a change and an isolation factor for their families. So I think it has to be rather enticing if you're going to ask physicians to do that.

A onetime infusion was given to the regional and provincial health authorities for the issue of equipment replacement and to ensure that the medical equipment is compliant to the year 2000. Well, of course one would support that in supplementary estimates. I have to say that I wonder if within this there has ever been a tracking done of the equipment that was shuffled in and out of hospitals that closed: what happened to that equipment and where it went. Did we sell it for next to nothing? Or is it stored in some of the minister of public works' big garages somewhere, turning obsolete so we have to buy new stuff? I guess that's a question that could rightly be asked under this because it certainly is a reasonable request to issue improvement of equipment, though I know that many hospitals fund-raise for that.

I think that's a sad statement. I'm not against fund-raising, but it seems that every time we turn around, it's fund-raising for schools, fund-raising for hospitals, fund-raising for all kinds of projects. It should be ultimately the responsibility of the government to properly fund health care and education, and I don't see that happening here.

It was interesting that money went to eliminate the deficits inherited by regional health authorities. Now, I guess regional health authorities are in a situation where they are in a bit of a moral dilemma when they say: "Can we run this? Can we actually deliver the service and not run a deficit?" I would say most of them know that they cannot. I think that if you're on that board, there's a part of you that says: how can we possibly run a deficit? Then the other part says: how can we possibly not and still deliver services? So I think that if we are ending up giving injections to eliminate deficits, et cetera, maybe it's time to revisit the amount of funding that is going to health care.

Now, going to Municipal Affairs, a few things about that. The supplementary estimates are requesting money for "Alberta Social Housing Corporation to fund additional realized losses on disposition of mortgages and properties." Well, some dispositions originally planned for '98 have already occurred. I guess my question then was: have we got the best bang for our buck there? What was the total book value of the mortgages? I think I asked this earlier, and I would appreciate an answer. I think in committee would be an appropriate time to get that, unless of course the minister is going to send letters with the responses. I haven't had an opportunity to hear from the minister, but maybe now that we're in committee we will. I do know that I asked that in second reading. I wanted to know, really, the cost-benefit analysis of that.

4:00

Public Works, Supply and Services. I always do like to ask questions of the hon. minister and Member for Stony Plain. It

does his heart good to answer my questions I know. One of the things I would like to ask is on the government requesting \$6.6 million to settle the Government Centre lands agreement with the city of Edmonton. I guess some of my questions, if the minister is free to give those answers, are: what is the substance of this agreement? What other needs is the government referring to in this request? How much of this \$6.6 million is for "other needs," and how much is for the agreement with Edmonton? Why is there no proper breakdown of other needs?

I'm wondering about the new plane for the Premier and his entourage. Was that under the regular budget, or was that under supplementary estimates? I would really love it if the minister could possibly respond to that today, because I'm sure he'd know whether that plane was just in extra money or if it was allotted in the budget and how much it cost. I appreciate that he did give that information to others in our caucus. However, I haven't seen the actual written paper yet, so I would appreciate if it were put here in the Legislature.

Of course, I love to speak about Transportation and Utilities. [interjection] Oh yes, I do. One of the things that I see here is the disaster recovery program. I guess what I think we should work on together in this Legislature is what constitutes a disaster. For example, the Minister of Labour turning his back, walking away: would that be a disaster? No. However, talking too loudly in the House would be. But with his back to me, it's just, you know, a little hard to concentrate.

However, I do want to talk about transportation . . .

MR. WHITE: And a broad back that is.

MRS. SOETAERT: And a broad back, yes.

But speaking about something else now, the disaster services. I appreciate it when the minister acts promptly. I think people don't realize that when you have a disaster and you lose your livelihood or you lose maybe some of your livestock if you're a farmer, people grieve. It's a grief not the same as losing someone you love, but it is a grief that you are losing something you have invested a lot of your heart and soul into building, and I think a prompt response from the government is appropriate. So I would venture to say that certainly the way the Peace River downtown core was dealt with was inappropriate. That was not timely, and it was very disappointing.

I also would venture to say that within this disaster program we have to address the issue of FIDP. It's obviously not working and certainly not for farmers who have had two years in a row of being too wet. They can't even get on their fields. In fact, I heard a story – I don't know if it's true or not – that farmers are actually scraping off the snow up north and putting the seed on the ground so that when it does thaw, they can grow it, because they know it's going to be too wet for them to get on. That's a story I heard this weekend; I haven't had a chance to validate it. But I would hope that certainly members from that area would be concerned about it and ask questions on their behalf in the Legislature. They certainly should be asking about that, because what we're talking about there is communities dying out. I would venture to say that if the government truly cared, we should be working with these farmers. Maybe it's time we look at a different crop up there or a new way of farming. Maybe they need some research help that the department has and certainly can provide.

That's not saying, you know, just walk in and do what you like. You always have to work with people who are involved in this,

but certainly there is a way to address these disaster areas with some compassion and with some common sense so that we don't lose some of these small rural communities. I would think that members across the way, some of them, should certainly understand the importance of small rural communities. If you lose 10 or 20 farmers that support that community, you know that community is gone. So I would like to see a review of our disaster programs because they are not meeting the needs of different people and, also, a way to have a prompt response from this government because people are grieving and certainly do need that quick response to cope with what they're going through.

After the Growth Summit there was a big announcement, I think to try to keep municipalities happy, that there was going to be a \$100 million cash injection, this onetime funding for infrastructure initiatives. I see that is mentioned here under supplementary estimates. Now, that's a good first move, but the problem with that is that it's never consistent. It's on the mood of the minister of the day and if he can convince the rest of his cabinet colleagues to go along with him. Maybe he's getting too much heat or too many phone calls from local municipalities, so we've got to give them some money to keep them quiet out there. Let's give them \$100 million. We'll pretend it will help infrastructure. Once you spread it out, it's really a drop in the bucket.

If we're really looking at that north/south trade corridor, which I think is essential to this province – I support the minister in his goal to try to get that double lane, certainly all the way up to Grande Prairie for starters – that \$100 million doesn't even touch the work that needs to be done in Edmonton to tie into that north/south corridor. In fact, \$240 million is what will be needed for the Edmonton part of that corridor. So that \$100 million – yes, I'm glad it's there, but I'd love to see a breakdown of where it went, what piece of road did it complete. I don't see that here, and I would hope that before we go to third reading, maybe the minister would have a chance to support that. Oh, it's under here, the grants to rural municipalities. Okay; I've got it here. As I understand it, then, this \$100 million was broken down and it is in there. I'll correct myself before somebody else pops up, because the chairman caught it but others didn't. That \$100 million still isn't going to go a great ways to doing that north/south corridor.

However, the resource road improvement program, which helped rural municipalities maintain their roads impacted by heavy industrial traffic or intensive agricultural activity – I just got a call on Friday about another road. I think it's highway 30 near Edson, and that is actually another primary road but really used a great deal by logging trucks and in terrible need of repair. Now, I don't see how the resource road improvement program helped that. It didn't help it at all.

So I realize the \$100 million is a good move, but my concern is that it's never consistent. It's kind of like: oh, we have a little extra; let's take something from maybe lottery dollars and give them another road, and they'll be happy for a little while. I think what municipalities deserve and certainly across this province is maybe some consistency in funding. [interjection] I missed what the minister said.

MR. HANCOCK: I said that was a new a new one, you asking for someone else to be quiet.

4:10

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes, it's odd that I would ask someone to be quiet, Mr. Chairman, but it has been known to happen. [interjection] After all, yes, my background in the classroom.

I would venture to say that municipalities would appreciate consistent and sufficient funding year after year after year. So of course I will support this extra money going in, but I would much rather see some consistency than underfunding.

I see, one, rural utility grants and services, and that funding was supposed to "help reduce the backlog of eligible distribution system extension projects under the Rural Gas Program." Now, my question to the minister on that would be: was that extra money spent for the transition to get Alberta gas privatized, which is one of the bills we are discussing presently in the House? Was that what that was for? I'd just like some clarification on that and how much money went to it.

I want to speak for a moment about advanced education. I'm very sad to see in Advanced Education nothing, no sense of relief for students who are doing their utmost to make ends meet. I know many students who work part-time. They have to live in the city away from their homes. That's why they have to get accommodation, because it is too far to commute. They are paying ever increasing tuition costs and working part-time, trying to get good marks, trying to get through those intense years of learning, which I encourage. No education is ever lost, and all of it is extremely valuable. I would hate to see people dropping out of different programs in advanced education because they just can't afford to go. I don't think that's the Alberta I want. I know it's not the Alberta I want, and it shouldn't be the Alberta they want. Yet regrettably that's the Alberta we're getting.

Now, I was glad to see some infrastructure dollars. I've been to a few of these facilities. In fact, I've gone to fund-raisers for several of them, which is always a delightful evening. But I would like to know where those infrastructure dollars went, to which buildings across the province. Is that under the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services? Is that under his domain? Even though it's under Advanced Education dollars, does he do the infrastructure designation? Maybe he can address that for me before we go to third reading. Maybe not, but we can always hope.

I see that some money went into a skills development training support program – and that's good – and a bonus program for government employees. I appreciate that. I think people have to feel that they have a vested interest in the place where they work, and if they can make things more efficient and more effective, then they deserve to be rewarded for that.

I want to speak for a moment about program funding. I see for Education – not for Advanced Education but Education – an increase in the basic instruction grant. Well, you know the way you always brag about the numbers going up. Alberta is growing; we're going to have to plan a little better for this. Do school boards have to wait for this extra funding to come in once they know the number of students? As they grow, how long do they have to wait for this money to come back? Because they have to accommodate these students right away. I realize the government can't give them the money until they do know the numbers. My question would be: how long does it take them to get back to them and increase their numbers for the added enrollment?

Some money was allocated for special needs of severely handicapped students. I'm wondering if within that there was some work with the groups who are working with the social services realignment and changes, if they are being taken care of or being included in some of these dollars, because those groups are . . . [Mrs. Soetaert's speaking time expired] Oh, I can't believe it. How times flies when you're enjoying yourself in the Legislature, Mr. Chairman.

I know that other people will enjoy continuing this debate, so I thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns about the supplementary estimates.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's indeed a pleasure to rise before you this afternoon to address Bill 16 and to speak to the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998, as brought forward by the hon. Provincial Treasurer.

You know, one of the things that has to be just sort of mentioned off the top, Mr. Chairman, is what it is that these supplementary supply bills are all about, because there are a number of people who do read *Hansard* and to whom *Hansard* gets sent and so on. It's important just to note for the record, off the top, that instructions come basically from the government through the hon. Lieutenant Governor for certain sums that are required because certain departments need these moneys to complete the operations they undertook in the previous year. Actually it's the year we're finishing off right now, but for all intents and purposes it's basically the previous year, 1997-1998.

I note that there are a number of expenditures required here, and it always interests me, Mr. Chairman, whether or not these supplementary supply bills are to cope with what you would call missed projections in some of the departments. Are they to cope with some overexpenditures in these departments? Or are the additional moneys required because of some oversight or some sudden emergency? Let's just take, for example, the area of disaster funding. That I can understand, but it never becomes clear enough to me when I read through the bill, which is a scant few pages, and then look for the detailed explanations in the actual book entitled 1997-98 Supplementary Estimates, General Revenue Fund, Alberta. It never ceases to amaze me that we don't quite have the kind of detail that should, in my view, accompany a request for the expenditure of several hundred millions of dollars.

I can appreciate, Mr. Chairman, that these moneys are there in the general revenue fund as a result of additional moneys that have come to us courtesy of higher than expected oil revenues or higher than expected revenues from Crown leases or gas or whatever other sources we might have. But it's always the case that I have to bug the ministers and the government in general for just a little more explanation as to what is behind this, over and above the one or two sentences of explanation that are given in the supplementary estimates booklet itself.

So I hope at some point we'll actually get to the stage where we will be provided with just a little more detail on these expended items, because who's going to argue with putting a little more money into health care? Certainly I'm not going to argue with that, but I would like to know exactly where it's going. I'll get into some of the detail here later. A little bit of detail is provided, but it's not specific enough. Similarly in Education or Advanced Ed or Municipal Affairs. We have to get to the point where we not only satisfy the members in this Assembly, but we're actually able to communicate this information to our constituents, to the citizens of Alberta, in a convincing fashion that makes it appear that we're doing everything we can to keep them in the fold in terms of understanding what it is that the government is up to on a daily and a yearly basis. So I will leave the challenge with the Provincial Treasurer and with the cabinet members in particular to simply expand somewhat on the additional detail so that we can all follow it.

4:20

I want to now turn my attention specifically to some of the details which are to be addressed during this special stage of debate called Committee of the Whole, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin with the Auditor General's area, wherein the government is requesting, presumably at his asking, the addition of \$350,000 to be voted in under section 1 of the bill. So I would turn to pages 9, 10, and 11 of the supplementary estimates booklet for some explanation and some detail of what's involved.

Here I see that the office of the Auditor General is requesting \$350,000 more for this current year's budget, '97-98, "to meet increases in the number of audit projects carried out by audit agents on behalf of the Office." Then it goes on to talk about the fact that there will be a rate of recovery of all of these moneys from the actual clients who are being audited. However, Mr. Chairman, the clients, as I understand it, in this instance are actually government departments or are agencies of the Crown or a commission or a board or whoever else is entrusted with public funds. So we're really basically auditing ourselves, if you like. I can appreciate the fact that \$350,000 more is required, and in this instance I have no problem supporting it, because I'm sure that the Auditor General must have seen fit to do additional audits other than what were planned for.

What I would ask the hon. Auditor General or the minister responsible, the Treasurer, who liaises with him, or the Attorney General or whoever it is for just a simple explanation of what the additional departments were. Which ones were they? Which commissions or agencies were they that they felt it necessary to go in and reaudit or extend an audit on? What was the amount of work required? What was it that they found in a particular department that perhaps caused them to spend twice as long as they had perhaps anticipated? That would be very helpful and very useful, and I don't think that would compromise the government's position on any of this. It would simply be an explanation to me, other members of the House here, and to all Albertans as to where it is that 350,000 additional dollars went. I'll bet you that in every case we would agree with the Auditor General, because one of the things that I would like to see the Auditor General do more of is the kinds of inquiries which from time to time various members of the House have requested. I would like to know whether or not that \$350,000 in Bill 16 is somehow reflective of some of those special inquiries that were requested.

For example, we had asked for a special inquiry to be done surrounding the Millar Western deal. That saw the government writing off, or writing down at least, something in the neighbourhood of \$250 million or \$272 million. That's a huge amount of money, and I'm wondering if the Auditor General would have conducted a special inquiry if he had been provided the moneys for it, because the justification was certainly there. When you're dealing with that large an amount of money, certainly I think it justifies the Auditor General going in and responding in as thorough a fashion as possible. So that's the kind of detail that I would hope would accompany these special appropriation estimates and supplementary supply bills.

Let me just turn to another department. I want to just say for the record before I leave the Auditor General that I'm quite impressed with the work being done there, and when the Auditor General does come to our Public Accounts, he does explain some of this stuff in very layman terms, which everyone is grateful for. But in terms of this amount of money specifically, I would certainly appreciate a little more detail, and perhaps someone will accede to that request.

Let me go to another area here of the appropriation bill, Mr. Chairman. That is the area of Advanced Education and Career Development, where an additional or supplementary estimate of \$35,900,000 is requested in order to provide for additional infrastructure renewal needs. I would say that this is very much needed. I believe \$12 million is anticipated in that respect. That's probably not enough for the long term, but it's obviously what has been requested for this go-round, and certainly I'm going to support that. I'm a very strong believer and a strong supporter of advanced education and career development in this province, and I've seen the benefits of it.

The next area which interests me is on page 16 of the supplementary estimates booklet which basically accompanies this bill, Mr. Chairman, and that's the \$23,900,000 set aside for an achievement bonus program for government employees. I know this has been talked about a little bit, but it's also something that I would seriously like to have a little further explanation on. Just exactly how does this achievement bonus program work, and what's it for? Is this intended to reward overworked government employees for time that they spend above and beyond? Is it intended to reward these overworked government employees for having done a particularly good job, what we used to call service beyond the call of duty? Is it for work being done by overworked government employees for bringing in their budgets under a certain percentage or on target? Or is it for them having successfully met the quotas? Exactly what's that for?

I appreciate that this is a new program, but there again the general public of the province would likely support that, because no one will argue that government employees, especially in the last few years, have done more than their share to try and cope with increased workloads, increased caseloads, increased student demands, perhaps increased requests for information, research, and so on. So I don't have any problem with the initiation of such a program. I would just like to know for the benefit of all Albertans a little bit more as to what's behind that.

Before I leave Advanced Education and Career Development, the other thing that I wanted to see was the government address the entire issue of student loans. How much money is in that pool on a matching basis with, let's say, initiatives taken by the federal government, or to what extent on a matching basis, if at all, is it possible for it to be increased or improved? I get a lot of calls at my office, Mr. Chairman, from students who feel unduly burdened with student debt when they graduate.

It's a problem that is twofold. First of all, there's perhaps not enough money available in the student loan program, and I appreciate that it's the major chartered banks in the east who administer that now. That's factor number one. Factor number two: when the students graduate, how realistic is it of us to expect them to pay that back immediately, and what time frame will they have within which to in fact repay those loans?

The other issue in Advanced Education and Career Development is with respect to student tuitions. I was interested to hear this morning from one of the I think board members or perhaps faculty members - I can't recall what his title was now - at Faculté St. Jean who was addressing the issue of diminished enrollments at that university. I was listening intently to his explanation of the fact that enrollment at the French Faculté St. Jean here in Edmonton has decreased by several percentage points, in the order of 30 or 40 percent if not more, over the last few years. When asked why this advanced education faculté had experienced this decrease, he basically said that two reasons accompany the answer. One of them is the cuts, specifically

provincial cuts, to advanced education programming, and secondly, the tuition fees were simply too high and they were preventing a lot of students from entering. Of course, that ties in to student loans and how much is or isn't available for each of these young people to pursue their career.

If the government is intent on addressing young people – I think they've used the term “support for children comes first,” but let's just say in a broader sense young adults who are going on into advanced education institutions – then I think it really behooves the government to look very seriously at what it is that they're doing to encourage student enrollment by Alberta children in these higher institutions, and I want to believe, by the way, that the government is intent on this area at least. So much emphasis, Mr. Chairman, has been put on importing students from beyond our borders, because as you know, people from other countries come here and they pay a marked premium for attending our universities and our colleges and our institutions. You might say that that source of revenue from international and foreign exchange students is a bit of a cash cow to our departments. But I want to talk about opportunities for Alberta children and for Alberta students, and one way that we can keep them and remain competitive is by providing them not only with a class education – once they qualify, they get in – but with the necessary funding or the necessary support to in fact bring them into the system to begin with.

4:30

Such was the fate, in any case, with regard to Faculté St. Jean. I was very surprised and somewhat disappointed, I have to add, when I heard about those enrollment numbers being down. Now, I don't know what the provincial government and the minister in particular might be able to do in response to that, but I want to raise that because many of my constituents attend Faculté St. Jean and speak French and wish to pursue their education in the other official language of this country, and they should be absolutely allowed to do that.

Let me turn now to just one other area – because my time, I fear, is going to be running short here – and that is the entire area of Community Development, which is addressed in this Bill 16 as well. It says here, Mr. Chairman, in the bill that Community Development is going to be transferring funds under section 4 of the bill, specifically \$555,000 worth of funds from the operating expense budget of the services to seniors' program to the capital investment budget of the same program to update computer systems.

Now, I'm certainly not opposed to updating our computer systems, but what I would like some clarification on is whether or not this transferral of half a billion dollars from the capital investment side to the upgrading of computers side is in any way taking money directly away from seniors' programs. In other words, are the operating expense budgets of the various seniors' programs able to cope with the aging population that we have, with the migration to our province that we're experiencing with this miniboom, and with the fact that more and more seniors are telling this member and I suspect other members that they're having difficulty coping with some of the programs at the moment? Not all but some.

One of the recent examples is with respect to the rising costs of pharmaceuticals, which seniors and anyone who is aging have a greater and more frequent reliance on. I was quite shocked, for example, to receive a call from a constituent on the weekend who asked me to clarify for him why it is that more and more drugs and pharmaceuticals are being moved off the Blue Cross program

for subsidy. I was stuck for an answer, but I told him I would undertake to find out. In particular, he was interested to know why cough syrup was being moved off. Now, that doesn't sound like a big deal to a lot of us who maybe use it once a year, but to somebody who has it as a prescription on a regular basis, it does amount to a significant amount of money.

I realize that this seniors' program funding in supplementary estimates may or may not necessarily tie in with the health care issue of seniors, but it is relevant, Mr. Chairman, because if we're already underfunding certain parts of seniors' programs, then I wonder if this transferral for computer updating is the most appropriate use of those dollars. If it is, then fine; so be it. I would just like that explained a little further. The seniors are the people who built this province. These are the people whom we should be caring for as much as we're caring for the children who are just coming into the province and being born here.

That takes me to . . . [Mr. Zwozdesky's speaking time expired] Is that the bell already? Perhaps I could come back and finish later, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise. I have some more questions on the appropriation bill, Bill 16 here. The Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development has made many public comments over the last couple of years about an imminent shortage of skilled workers in the province. I would like to know how the minister justifies the \$8 million in unexpended funds being reallocated from the skills development training support program to fund postsecondary infrastructure? Are these funds not desperately needed for skills training?

After \$219 million was cut from the Advanced Education budget since 1993-1994, what studies has the department done that indicate that an extra \$20 million will be adequate to upgrade and modernize Alberta's deteriorating postsecondary infrastructure? As this funding will be delivered through a performance envelope, what is the department doing to ensure that every institution has stable funding to ensure that students have access to the level of technology they will be required to use in the workplace? How can the institutions compete for increased funding, which is now largely based on performance measures? We all know about the performance measures and how they do not work. When will this government provide adequate base funding? This is a puzzling question for me with the advanced education department, as to how, with the imminent trade shortage, they could move this \$8 million around. I will be anxious, Mr. Chairman, to hear a response eventually from the minister.

Now, I too, as well as my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Creek, have some comments, some questions. I'm very curious about this \$24 million for an achievement bonus program for government employees. I understand these funds are being placed temporarily in a central pool administered by the personnel administration office until they can be distributed to the ministries. I would like to know: how is this being done? How are these bonuses being allocated? This is a lot of money, and we need some answers for this, Mr. Chairman.

I would also like to talk a little bit about the office of the Auditor General. The Auditor General has served this province very, very well. In fact, in the last session I asked some questions to the Minister of Labour regarding the delegated administra-

tive organizations, those dangerous arm's-length organizations, Mr. Chairman. The answers I received from the minister were – it was curious. I was, to be polite, put off. But the Auditor General over the summer looked into this matter of uninspected pressure piping systems and pressure vessels. Many of them have very, very important public safety considerations, because of course sour water and sour gas are processed in these, and we all know that sour water and sour gas can cause not only harm to the public, but it can cause death if the concentration of hydrogen sulphide is strong enough.

The Auditor General looked into this matter, and he made two very strong recommendations in the Auditor General's report, which I'm sure has not been tabled in this House yet. The response has been tabled but not the Auditor General's report itself, as I recall. Recommendations 22 and 23 came forward with strong, strong suggestions and possible solutions to this problem of uninspected pressure vessels and pressure piping systems. The Minister of Labour I'm sure read keenly and with interest recommendations 22 and 23, and as a result of reading these with interest, I'm sure he's going to listen to the Auditor General keenly.

4:40

Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars has been requested by the office of the Auditor General. This will increase the operating expense of the office from \$9.3 million to \$9.6 million, an increase of 3.7 percent. Mr. Chairman, if this amount of money – even though a lot of it, from what I can understand, will be reclaimed through auditing fees – will help the Minister of Labour administer his department and all these dangerous arm's-length organizations that have been created over the years, then this is money very, very well spent. It is probably the best money that can be spent, because we know there are no inspections going on. It doesn't matter what part of the province you're living in. Whether it be a school in my constituency, a hospital in Spruce Grove . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: There's no hospital in my riding.

MR. MacDONALD: There's no hospital in your riding?

MRS. SOETAERT: Not at all. In Stony Plain.

MR. MacDONALD: Oh. Okay. Stony Plain. But there's one in St. Albert.

But there are industrial batteries. They're not inspected. They may be located immediately next to a farmyard, and not only are the farmer and his family living close to this but perhaps his livestock as well. These are very, very important issues, and this \$350,000 will make the Department of Labour, through the guidance from the Auditor General, work much better. The Auditor General charges an audit fee – and hopefully this is going to come back – to clients who have significant sources of revenue. The Auditor General is a very worthwhile office in this government, Mr. Chairman.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. I don't think the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services is rising on a point of order.

MR. WHITE: It's kind of hard to tell which way he's facing sometimes.

Mr. Chairman, I rise to speak to Bill 16, which is of course the supplementary estimates to allow the government to move some moneys around in an existing budget in order to meet some obligations and to do a number of things that need to be done. I have pointed out in the past that there is one area of supplementary estimates that I'm pleased to see in the department of intergovernmental affairs, which is putting some moneys into the Métis settlements, I believe. In any event, in reading it prior to this, the message was clear that there are some land settlements coming in, and it's money well spent. Unfortunately, it could and should be budgeted, I would believe, to give those that are working towards these settlements some hope that there is something to be coming. That's the one area that I can say I agree with. There are other areas of course, in Community Development and Family and Social Services, where the capital expenditures and the operating expenditures are both welcome.

My difficulty is the amount of these supplementary estimates. I believe that what is not contained in this volume is probably much more important than that which is contained.

I turn your attention to hospitals, starting in my own city, the emergency wards of our city. Now, we live in a province that prides itself on being very progressive and certainly caring for those that do find themselves in emergency. This is one area where there's some money that could be spent immediately. We could have taken that money which was surplus to the government's needs through the '97-98 year and immediately supplemented the emergency wards of this city in particular, the ones I'm most familiar with. Certainly there are areas in Calgary that need the funds also and I'm sure in smaller centres too, where they run with a great backlog and simply do not have the funds to provide the care that's required.

I believe that health care should be and is the highest priority of a government, and it obviously is not with this government. Otherwise, they would take heed of all the warnings from the doctors, the practising nurses, the LPNs, and we the users. Those of us that have younger children – mine are older now, into the years when they don't have quite so many disasters. I know that when my children were younger, a trip to the emergency ward now and again was in order. When you have a child that is hurting and you arrive and find that there are other children in line – there are those who are waiting on gurneys; there are old people who are in dire need of assistance. You're looking and saying: well, how can I justify this, what I see before me, with what I have to do while standing in the Legislature in a suit? It's rather difficult to say that I would not say anything about the health care that's provided on the very, very front line of our health care system, that being the emergency ward service. I think it's woefully inadequate, and it doesn't seem to strike a note here. I quite frankly don't understand how there are those of us who cannot see it.

I'll move on to another area where I think moneys could be expended immediately to relieve some of the pressure, and I'm talking about long-term care beds. Long-term care beds, as you know, in this province are in very, very short supply. They in fact are doing something that's called blocking, I'm told. The long-term beds get full, and then when an active treatment patient becomes well enough to go into a long-term care facility for an extended period of time – it may not be forever, but it could be for some length of time – you cannot move that person out. There is no facility for care other than active treatment. I can see that some of these moneys could and should have been put directly into refurbishing some of those beds that have been

closed. In my constituency there's a whole hospital that is vacant and in fact could well take a lot of long-term care patients without massive renovation. Yes, it would take some renovation, and yes, it would take some work, but it certainly wouldn't be the expense of providing a new facility. These moneys could be expended from the general revenue fund in supplementary estimates.

I move to another area also in health care that concerns me. We hear that the doctors are having difficulty providing service. They're talking about putting a cap on their service and are saying: if I have to plan more than three months for my appointments, then I'll just cut them off; I will not make appointments beyond three months, because my plate is absolutely full. More and more and more doctors are doing this. This should tell someone in this government something. These experts in their field are simply overtaxed.

Now, you could say that they're looking to use this tactic as a negotiating tactic. I think not. Quite frankly, I think their services are being overtaxed. We should have been spending a great deal more time and effort to alleviate that so that one doesn't have to look at a trip to the specialist three months out and then another couple of months in order to get another appointment and another couple of months after that. Surely the problem does not get any better; it only can get worse over time. I quite frankly don't see the savings in treating it later when it could be treated today and probably with a much better outcome, getting that person up and running and back into the workforce and doing what they do best, paying the shot in the way of taxes, which we all must pay. Getting that person to the highest level of wellness as early as possible has to be a good end, and health care expenditures out of this budget could have gone a long way to do that.

4:50

I'll move along, as time is short today certainly, to children's services. All you have to do to understand that some of these moneys could be expended much better in child care services is just simply go to a food bank. Stand at a food bank. Stand there and watch. See who comes in and what they're looking for. By and large, these are mothers and fathers that are coming to look to supplement the diet of their children. Now, I believe that's an indictment on this government, putting these people in the position of having to go and beg for food, because in fact that's what they are doing. They're going with their hand held out. Many of them come in as much of a disguise as they possibly can so as to avoid recognition. It certainly is not the kind of thing that you want to propagate in a society, to put people down to a position where they have to come with hands out.

Another area that could have been included in the supplementary estimates but was not is day care. We have set a standard in this province that is hard to meet with the funds that are available. It's darn difficult for a parent to go off to work when they must to make ends meet and leave their child when the subsidy for care is so low that you're concerned about whether they have a level 1 or a level 2 or simply have enough people to care for the child. I believe one of the things that could and should be done in a society is to do all one can to foster the growth of early childhood development.

As I'm sure that most of us here are aware, a great deal of learning, particularly social learning, occurs very, very early on in a child's life. If they learn the wrong kinds of skills it takes to exist in this society, the ones that are confrontational, denial, getting around having to perform at all, and taking no responsibility for their actions – these are all the kinds of responses that you

do not want a child to learn. If a child is left on their own with very poor care, this is exactly what we're teaching them. Quite frankly, more money in child care and early childhood education could certainly provide an opportunity – I wouldn't guarantee it – to guide these children to a place where learning and performing to their best ability could possibly pay enormous dividends some 10, 15, 20, and 25 years out.

Moving on to education in the same vein, dealing with children, when we look at the number of schools that deal with specialized areas, they're just chock full. I have a couple of schools in my constituency, one that was here not long ago with a number of the children and one that the minister of social services in fact visited a while back. It's a special school in that it deals with a lot of Métis and native-born children. They have some very special needs, and those needs are met by very, very few schools. This particular school is so full that they can't possibly accept another child. Every classroom is just as full as it can possibly be, and there is no room at the inn. It's a real sad state when this occurs, and there isn't enough money to provide the leadership that the children need, the examples in the school. There's just not enough help to bring the elders in to show them that there are better ways to live and to learn. It's just absolutely disastrous. This particular school has a great spirit about it, but it needs help. It needs some special funds and some special interest, and it simply is not getting it.

I point to a program in this particular school, a hot lunch program. Well, this is indicative of something. These poor children – and I mean literally poor children as well as figuratively – do not have enough to eat, plain and simple. If they're interviewed, they will admit that they oftentimes didn't have anything to eat for breakfast, and lunch time is the highlight of their day. They are on their absolute best behaviour. They're just wonderful to be around because there's somebody that cares enough about them to feed them. There simply is no room in this budget for those children, it appears. There's absolutely no room. I would think this is one area where we would like to spend – just out of simple compassion I would give up, and as a matter of fact do give up, part of my 1 and a half percent tax rebate for that purpose and that purpose alone. To see the joy on a child's face when \$15 a month is all it costs to aid this program, which feeds two children for the entire month, it's not very much to pay. If we took that hundred dollars that most of us in this room receive, because we make that much save and except perhaps the pages, we could all be quite happy with feeding well perhaps as many as another 3,000 children and aiding with their survival in a tough society.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Going from there is a natural transition into the social services area. With social services a mom with a young child will gross \$10,793 max in the province of Alberta, a province that is billed as milk and honey, a province, the government will tell you, that is so great that we have seniors moving here in droves, so great that we have young employables moving here in droves, yet we simply do not provide a living for a mother and a child.

Newfoundland, where the cost of living is considerably less than it is here – I mean, you can rent an entire house for the amount that you can rent a one-bedroom apartment for on the outskirts of Calgary – is in the order of 2,200 and some odd dollars more for that same mother. Now, that says something to me, that it's a pretty sad, sad state of a government. It's not just

an element of philosophy either. It's actual practicality. It's being out there. It's an investment in the future, and I don't see that investment in the future from this government at all.

Advanced education is an area where just a few short weeks ago we had demonstrations on the steps here because this government in their wisdom said: yes, our money is capped to higher levels of learning; we will allow the tuition to rise, and we'll put a cap on that at 30 percent. Thirty percent is an unbelievably high number for a student that simply cannot afford to manage the situation. I mean, the number of children that this government, this Legislature has disenfranchised simply by economics is unbelievable.

When I attended that fine institution, my tuition was somewhere in the order of 15 to 17 percent of the cost of education. I'm quite thankful for that education. I have by way of my earnings recontributed to this society and fulfilled part of my dream to become educated and aided and abetted in the export industry and engineering and construction technology certainly. But that's because this government invested. The government of the day invested some money in me, but that does not seem to be the case here.

5:00

I was one, and still am actually, of seven children, and my parents simply couldn't afford to send all of us off to university, afford the kind of money that it costs to do that. Likewise, today a family of seven simply has to pick and choose amongst their children as to who can possibly go to university, because there simply are not enough scholarships and bursaries about.

Now, if there has ever been an investment in the future and ever a place to place money and ever a spot to say, "Here are some expenditures of some money that we ended up with at the end of the year," as opposed to blowing it on some department's needs that may or may not be required at that time, it is to put it in this level, to put it to the universities and say: hold the tuitions down so that every single student that meets the academic qualifications and perhaps doesn't meet the financial qualifications is able to come to this institution; allow them to come and further their education and therefore build that which we call a prosperous Alberta.

Another area that I'd like to turn to now, Madam Chairman, is municipal downloading. Now, here is an area that has reached crescendo proportions with the announcement of the recent budget in Calgary, of course, and so it should have. But setting aside the major institutions that have the wherewithal to deal with the press daily, deal with the smaller municipalities and the moneys that are simply not there. When the crunch comes in this particular tax year, you're going to find that virtually every property in this province is going to have a tax increase.

Now, I would have thought that this government would have agreed that there's but one taxpayer. So instead of taking the extra funds that we have here and paying a debt off, say: lookit; there are some other municipalities out there that only have three ways to raise money: one, raise taxes, which they're going to have to do; two, borrow money, which we don't want them to do at all - we'd much sooner that they pay down their debt and we become debt free overall as taxpayers, not just one level of government - and three, of course, is through some government assistance and grants. Surely this is the better option. It's hardly worth it to have money in one pocket so that you can pay for all of the things that you require but in the other pocket you have absolutely none.

Madam Chairman, I have another four or five departments here

that I would like to speak on, but my time is up. I suspect that being in committee, I'll be able to rise again before 5:30 and again after 10 tonight.

Thank you.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd just like to give a few clarifications on some comments that were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek and the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and maybe several other comments.

If we look at Bill 16, which is the appropriation act, there's a requisition for extra dollars by the Auditor General, and as chairman for Leg. Offices I would like to clarify. This is not actually more money that he is going to use in his current budget. What has happened is that when he gets his yearly budget and he has his complement of staff to do the work that he's obliged to do over the year, often we call on him to do some extra work which is just on a term basis, one special assignment where the funding is recoverable through a charge to that agency.

Right now he's been doing some work on the finances of RHA 11, south of Edmonton, because of the split that's going to be happening. What he does in a case like that is hire an outside firm, and this outside firm goes and does the work. The work is recoverable, so the expense is charged out, but when the money comes in, it goes into general revenue. There are no actual funds in his budget to pay for this type of work that he subcontracts out, but it's recovered and goes into general revenue. All the money, the \$350,000 this year, was recovered for work he's done for agencies across the province, and the money came to general revenue. It's an accounting procedure. The money cannot be directed directly into the account of the budget of the Auditor General. So I would like to clarify that.

I'd also like to clarify that this person - and I think there were some comments made - is not a direct employee of the government; he's an employee of this Legislature. He is appointed upon the recommendation of Leg. Offices, which is an all-party committee, and on the recommendation of the committee is appointed and is answerable to Leg. Offices and not to the government itself. So I thought I'd clarify these two points to make sure that this is clear.

Also, there was a comment made that the annual report of the Auditor General was not tabled in the Assembly. The custom has been that usually the Auditor General releases his report in the fall. It was released September 15, '97, last fall. All the reports in the past years that have been released in the fall are then in the following spring session tabled in the Assembly. As chairman of Leg. Offices I will within a few days be tabling four copies of the Auditor General's report in this Assembly. Just to clarify, all the MLAs were mailed or given a copy of this when it was released by the Auditor General. So it's already public knowledge; it's just a matter of tabling.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm rising to speak this afternoon to Bill 16, supplementary estimates. I welcome this opportunity to put forth some questions and suggestions. I'd like to talk about a couple of different depart-

ments that are contained in the supplementary estimates, specifically Advanced Education, Community Development, Education, Family and Social Services, Health, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, and Municipal Affairs. I appreciate this opportunity to talk about what is in the estimates and what is not in the estimates.

I am pleased to see that there is additional funding going into the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development for adult learning – support for adult learning is how it is put here – although I notice that quite a bit of it is for infrastructure renewal, and I was hoping that we would get more money in there for some programs that are desperately in need of it. Specifically, those programs would include strengthening the apprenticeship programs. I know that the minister is very aware of the needs in this area. Apprenticeship in the trades is very important in Alberta. I think it's the backbone of our labour force, and any strengthening or increased opportunity that's available there is much appreciated.

I have also been contacted a number of times by groups that are providing English as a Second Language training and programs. Specifically I'm talking about Changing Together, which is an organization that meets the needs of immigrant women, and the Mennonite Centre, both of which are in my riding and do excellent work. They are both in need of support in their funding. Their client base is increasing, not decreasing. I think that helping agencies like that to help immigrants and non-English speakers – because, of course, we do now have Canadian children who are born speaking English as their second language. Anything we can do to support these organizations in running these programs helps all of us, because it is helping to integrate immigrants into our workforce and into an active participation in the life of Alberta. There's a lot of talent and intelligence and creativity that is there that can be brought in to make Alberta a richer place.

5:10

One of the concerns that I brought up before – I didn't see it addressed here, and I'm really concerned about this – is the recognition of the necessity of gender-specific employment training for women. Now, I know that under the federal government guidelines women are considered a designated group for funding and that under the provincial guidelines they are not. This is of great concern to me.

With the Canada/Alberta labour market agreement the employment programs are now a provincial responsibility. There was an excellent program that was being funded under the federal program called Options for Women. This is an organization that's been around for a long time. I think they're going on 20 years, maybe a little less than that. They originally started to help women who were divorced and were finding a financial need to get back into the workforce, and these were older women. So it was retraining programs to help them make their way back into the labour force and be productive citizens in Alberta. Given the demand, they've since had to expand their programming to include all ages of women.

This program, Options for Women, has great respect from the federal government, and I am looking for reassurance from this government that their program would continue to get funding under the provincial guidelines. I was hoping I would see that. When I got the supplementary estimates, I quickly opened them to Advanced Education and Career Development hoping that I would see it in there, and I didn't. This is of great concern, certainly to me, certainly to that group, and to a number of other

women who have contacted me and expressed that concern. I don't see it in the supplementary estimates. I certainly hope I'm going to see it in the budget estimates.

Those are my comments under Advanced Education, and I'd like to go now to Community Development. I notice that the transfer of money that is happening here is for capital investment to upgrade computer systems. I'm pretty sure, if my memory serves well, that there was also a similar transfer last year to cover computer programs. I'm assuming this has to do with the clean and efficient operation of the Alberta seniors' benefit plan.

I was also looking to see if there was more support being given to the other programs and branches that are found under the Department of Community Development. One of the things I have found in this last year as I watch the funding and I watch the groups that are indeed funded under Community Development and through the lottery foundations that are administered under this department is that over the long term – and I'm talking since 1983 – the pie has remained the same size, but there are more groups that have come in and qualify for funding. Also, groups that grow cannot get additional funding that keeps pace with their growth.

So we now have a situation in Alberta, certainly in the arts and culture sector and also in the sports, recreation, parks, and wildlife sector, where the limitation in the amount of funding that's available is precluding growth. It's precluding strengthening these organizations. Given that we had such strong recommendations coming out of the Growth Summit on improving quality of life and that specifically they were talking about arts and culture and sports and recreation, I was hoping that I would see some additional recognition and support under this particular department.

I'm just going to talk briefly about amateur sports and recreational opportunities for adults and families. I'm hearing from a lot of people that they're feeling the strain of the download onto them. As funding becomes less available to the groups that are offering programs, there are more user fees being charged by the organizations. As a result, there is more pressure on the families to come up with that money, and either they're going to have to pay a fee or they have to commit to so many hours of bingo working and casino volunteerism. The families that have come to me have said that they want their children to have a wide range of experiences in arts and culture and different kinds of sports and recreation, but really when they started to add it all up, they were going to end up working five or six bingos a month and at least a casino a month trying to help the organizations raise the funds.

What's being covered? I mean, are these extra frills that are being asked for by these groups? No, they're not. They're looking for money to support teams and team sport. They're looking for money for equipment, for travel of teams to other locations to engage in competition with other teams. This is becoming more and more of a strain on people, particularly the middle-class and lower-class or working poor individuals in Edmonton-Centre. I think it's something we need to look to because it is starting to get beyond the reach of people. We agreed earlier today that amateur sports and participation in recreational activities is a good thing. It does enhance the quality of life in Alberta. I'm really seeing these organizations under strain.

Part of what is happening is that families are opting for sports that don't require equipment and don't require participating with a team. So it's individual things. I don't have any studies, but I'm sort of wondering if this is as good a fitness or recreational opportunity. I mean, walking is a perfect example. I don't find many kids think walking is a really cool activity. There's nothing

fun to play with. There's no skateboard or snowboard or tennis racquet or anything that comes with it. So I think we need to look to this.

Under Education I was really hoping, given the number of studies we've had and the information we've been given, the test programs that have been run, that there would have been a reinvestment or a commitment to programs that are assisting children like the Head Start program. We've heard a lot in this Assembly about the hot lunch programs. I can't believe we've come to that point in Alberta where we're needing to seriously consider this, but I think we do need to seriously consider it. We are not able to give our children the best opportunity for education. We all want to have the most efficient dollars at work here, and if it's going to be a more efficient use of our dollars to be providing hot lunches to kids so they can stay awake and concentrate on their work, I truly wish that we would look to that.

One of the things that is a serious concern to the schools in my constituency of Edmonton-Centre is aging school buildings. A number of schools in my constituency are quite old. They were built very early in this century, and they have severe infrastructure problems. They have crumbling and ancient furnace systems and a very limited electrical capacity, which certainly affects a number of other things. For instance, they are having trouble putting computers in, were they able to afford it, because the electrical is simply not up to code to be able to carry the extra load of electricity the computers require. That issue, I know, has been raised, and again I was hoping that I would see that in here. I certainly hope that it's been included in the next budget, the '98-99 budget, because it's a serious concern. We're going to be coming soon to an ugly point where we have parts of buildings falling down on the children's heads. I know there've been times when the members opposite have accused me of saying that the sky's falling, but I don't think any of us want that on our heads.

There are a couple of other areas that I would like to touch on, but I think what I'll do is ask that we adjourn debate now, and then I can come back tonight and finish what I have to say. So I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 16, and I can come back at 10 o'clock and keep going.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Having heard the motion to adjourn debate, does the Assembly agree?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? It's carried.
The Deputy Government House Leader.

5:20

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 1 and report progress on Bill 16.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 1. The committee reports progress on Bill 16. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that we now call it 5:30 p.m. and adjourn until 8 o'clock this evening and that when we do, we convene in Committee of Supply.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: All in support of this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.
Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:21 p.m.]