

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 24, 1998** 1:30 p.m.
Date: 98/03/24
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

Guide us in our deliberations as Members of the Legislative Assembly, and strengthen us in our awareness of our duties and responsibilities as members.

Grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to preserve the blessings of this country for the benefit of all and to make good laws and wise decisions.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 41, 42, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, and 54.

I am also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 43, 44, 52, 53, 55, and 56.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table four copies of some documents today. The first document lists the stakeholders that were consulted on electrical deregulation. It is three pages long. The second lists 15 technical discussion papers that were circulated to stakeholders. The third lists 12 different documents that can be found on the Internet explaining various aspects of electrical deregulation.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a letter from the Industrial Power Consumers Association of Alberta stating their support and outlining why this legislation should move forward.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure today to table four copies of the final report and recommendations from the nonprofit tax exemption review committee. In tabling this report I'd like to thank the Albertans – the not-for-profits, the community associations – who addressed the hon. members for Calgary-Glenmore, Banff-Cochrane, and West Yellowhead in the preparation of this report.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table four copies of a report called Inception Study done by ESBI Alberta Ltd. having to do with the deregulation of electricity services in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file today copies of Alberta's 100th Anniversary Strategy Commit-

tee's report to government and the news release making that announcement. This outstanding and dedicated committee heard from more than 17,000 Albertans who shared their ideas on how to celebrate Alberta's centennial in 2005.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table five copies of a letter from Dr. Philip Hardin of the West Edmonton Diabetes Centre. The letter was addressed to Sheila Weatherill, president of the Capital health authority, and it addresses several issues to do with the provision of services to diabetics in the west Edmonton area and makes specific reference to the endocrine working group report on diabetic education and care.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 62 students from Queen Street school. Half of them take their education in French immersion and half in English, and half of them got their tour en français. They were quite thrilled today and very pleased with the tour that they had. They are here with their teachers, Mrs. Carmen Mykula, Mrs. Bonnie Weiss, Mrs. Cheryl Berke. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 15 very keen students from the transitional vocational program at Alberta Vocational Centre. They're accompanied today by their instructors, Ms Judy Dobbs and Mr. Orest Zavediuk, and I would ask them to please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure to introduce a very special guest to the members of the Assembly today. He is Mr. Roger Delisle of Montreal. He is the supreme grand master of Sovereign Great Priory of Canada, a Christian Masonic order with priories located from Newfoundland to Victoria, B.C. He's in the second year of his office and is traveling throughout Alberta this week visiting with more than 1,000 members of the order in this province. He's escorted by members of the Edmonton Preceptory No. 46. The accompanying members of the preceptory are Mr. James Bremner, Mr. Thomas Bremner, Mr. Peter Fairbridge, Mr. Raymond Burke, and Mr. Charles Weir. I'll ask these guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I do have another set of guests to introduce. These are 32 grade 10 students and their teacher Mr. Lloyd Grosfield. They're also accompanied by their chaperons whose names, unfortunately, I don't know. They're all from Concordia high school in the constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. They are

seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has said that residential consumers of electricity will be the beneficiary of the government's policy to deregulate the electrical industry. While he perhaps cannot guarantee, of course, that residential power rates will go down, he hasn't even produced a single shred of evidence, not a single study, not a single piece of analysis that backs up his bold prediction. Could the Premier please table those studies that give him such confidence in his prediction?

MR. KLEIN: Well, quite coincidentally, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Energy just tabled massive amounts of documentation supporting this particular piece of legislation, and I will have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I just tabled appendix 3 here. I'm not a master at the Internet, but if the hon. member wants to write this down, www.energy.gov.ab.ca/elec/elec.htm, then you'll be able to access 12 discussion papers that, in fact, take forward part of it, the option for customer choice and market rates going into the future.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, could the Premier please confirm that his government has in its possession studies which indicate that power rates for residential consumers may in fact increase as much as 10 percent, not going down at all?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is very subjective. Power rates are subject at any time to a rate increase through the existing situation of a regulated industry.

Again, I would ask the hon. minister to supplement.

1:40

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I will send some information to the hon. member so that he can understand electrical deregulation. What we're doing is we're taking the 8,000 megawatts . . . [interjections] I don't know that they want to hear the answer.

We're taking the 8,000 megawatts, and in the year 2001 we will do an assessment of the existing cost of power of all the plants that are in the province of Alberta, and then we will put them into the pool, bid them into the pool through marketers, and the low-cost power that we have today will carry forward over 20 years.

Inside that bid system that we will have to put into the pool, we will have the residual value that the customers have paid into these plants over the lifetime of those plants. As well we're treating in that bid process the stranded costs so that the companies will not lose money that we asked them to invest in plants and take the risk to produce the 8,000 megawatts.

Now, when you take the two of those apart there is a substantial amount of savings to the individual consumer, who has a choice for a stable rate option going into the future. He doesn't have to go to the marketplace immediately, and he will be protected with that low-cost power going out in those 20-year contracts.

If you understood electrical deregulation – and I'll try to send the papers – you wouldn't have to ask a question like that.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, did the Premier mean it yesterday in question period when he implied that he is prepared

to delay this bill at least until the next spring session, and with any luck we'd have a fall session at which he could bring it back?

MR. KLEIN: No. It is entirely up to the opposition as to how smoothly this piece of legislation goes through, Mr. Speaker. The hon. minister feels that it's a good piece of legislation. It's the culmination of four years of public consultation and discussion. I think that the . . .

MR. MITCHELL: The opposition held up Bill 26; that's for sure.

MR. KLEIN: Is that a fourth supplementary, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, again I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, it's imperative that this act go forward in this session of the Legislature because the marketplace is fast consuming the power that we have out there, and to set the different processes in place to have a completely deregulated power industry, we need to start this year. But that's not to say that this won't be open for discussion as we go forward. I have promised the stakeholders that we will open the act again in 1999, not only to look backwards to what we're doing this spring but also to take forth the necessary checks and balances in the act to ensure that deregulated power goes ahead smoothly.

We are also going to spend the next year – we have promised the stakeholders, all stakeholders, that we will spend a year and go back to them developing the regulations. So the principles of the bill are going forth this spring, but the how-to is going to be arduously worked out with the stakeholders over the next year.

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

Health Care Funding

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At midnight March 31 all excess revenues formally become the official surplus and legally must be applied against the debt. The deadline is getting closer, but the government isn't getting any closer to resolving underfunding in clearly demonstrated areas of health care in this province. RHAs are facing a combined deficit of at least \$138 million for patient care needs, and Albertans expect this government to respond positively and responsibly before March 31. To the hon. Provincial Treasurer: will you confirm that over this past week alone you are projecting an additional \$16 million of unexpected revenues from the sale of Crown leases?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, updates are ongoing as far as the budget goes, but I can tell the member and the Premier has indicated very clearly and the Minister of Health has indicated very clearly that issues and pressures related to health will be dealt with if they're identified clearly, if it's seen that these truly are needs and that they're affordable. Health is obviously one of the areas that has been identified, not just for reinvestment, which is already done, but for ongoing maintenance. We will not see the level of health care in this province fall to levels which would be untenable, and that's why the Minister of Health is working carefully with the regional health authorities.

We have a budget year that is drawing to a close, and we are in the very enviable position of having about \$2.3 billion which we will put down towards the debt. It's a very exciting position to be in. As we move into the next budget year, the Minister of Health continues to – there's no magic line at which he ceases to

talk to RHA people. He will continue to do those consultations. As the year progresses, we'll watch carefully. If adjustments have to be made, if it can be shown, proven, and identified as we move into the next budget year. then we'd look at doing those.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Treasurer, will you start those adjustments by dedicating this \$16 million of unexpected revenues along with additional revenues that are required to retire these proven deficits, which are at least \$138 million? Will you make that commitment?

MR. DAY: You know, Mr. Speaker, one day we get accused because we make budget changes or changes in assumptions and presumptions. We get criticized for being sensitive. Then the next day we get criticized because we're not doing certain things.

I've explained very clearly that we have a budget year that is drawing to a close, and as a matter of fact final revenues in terms of the budget year – the member knows quite well that the final quarter of this budget year '97-98 is reported on in June. It takes a while for certain corporate tax and other taxes and leases and various revenues to be substantiated and to be actually catalogued so that we have a firm handle on what those are. I don't understand why one day he would criticize us because we'd say: you know, we're thinking along with the rest of the world that we may have to adjust our oil projections. So we get criticized for making an adjustment or helping a particular area. The next day we're criticized because we're not making adjustments, and then we should make adjustments, and then we shouldn't make them.

We're into a budget year here. The budget year is folding out even better than planned. As we move into this next budget year, we have the same types of protections for the public in terms of whether it's an oil shock or some kind of a revenue reduction. We'll continue with that, and I'll continue to look to the opposition critic for guidance, but criticism for doing something or not doing something and then changing their position every day – it's a little difficult to keep track of.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: You have a demonstrated need of \$138 million, and you have a surplus of \$2.3 billion. I don't think there should be a problem. That's pretty clear.

If you want to make it clearer, Mr. Speaker, for average Albertans to understand, why won't you include RHAs within the government's consolidated financial statements to improve the transparency and the accountability and the understandability for average Albertans of what's going on with health care budgets? Why won't you move it in there?

MR. DAY: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, that's an issue that we've talked about. It's an issue which even the Auditor General has contemplated. You have regional health authorities with elected boards, and they have certain mandates that they're given. One of those which we talked about . . .

MR. KLEIN: Appointed boards.

MR. DAY: Sorry. With appointed boards. I realize that's somewhat of an issue.

Mr. Speaker, these RHAs are given mandates under which they have to operate, and we talked yesterday right here in the Assembly about the fact that the Minister of Health has said to them that when it comes to their own deficits, they can have a short-term deficit as long as their business plan contemplates a

way to be out of that deficit. So should we as the province on our consolidated budgeting – we have been told not only by our Auditor General here that we have a very clear consolidated set of budgeting, but people from across the country talk about our consolidated budget being very clear, very transparent, and very accountable, and now we've given authority to regional health authorities for their budget. Does ours move every time one of the RHAs either has a deficit or posts a surplus? If they have a surplus, do we post that on our consolidated surplus and in fact maybe even move in and skim off those dollars? Talk to the RHA people about that. I don't think they'd like that idea.

Shooting Deaths on Tsuu T'ina Reserve

MS OLSEN: Mr. Speaker, on Sunday there was a tragic incident at Tsuu T'ina reserve. A woman and a child are dead. Having been a police officer, I know how dangerous it can sometimes be to attend these kinds of situations. I also know that it is important for Albertans to find out exactly what happened at Tsuu T'ina. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. A newspaper report indicated that you will only be conducting a public inquiry into this matter if there are no criminal charges laid. Is that true?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, the process is for the criminal investigation to take place and, once that's concluded, to determine whether or not charges will be laid. Typically fatality review inquiries will not be held until the criminal matter is disposed of. After it's disposed of, it is then up to the Fatality Review Board to make a determination as to whether or not, based on input from the Chief Medical Examiner, an inquiry will be held.

1:50

What has happened in the past, Mr. Speaker, is that if the matter did proceed to criminal charges and through the courts, there was quite often a full and public airing of the matter at that time, and sometimes the board has determined that because of that, they did not have to have an inquiry. But the first step is to dispose of the criminal inquiry and investigation and then to determine after that whether or not a Fatality Review Board inquiry will be held, and the board will make that decision.

MS OLSEN: My second question is to the Minister of Justice. Why would you not commit to a public inquiry, given that the results of a criminal investigation would not include recommendations to help prevent future tragedies?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just answered that. We have to let the process work and allow for the criminal investigation to proceed. Quite frankly, we should be restraining ourselves from making any comments with respect to this, because the matter is being investigated by the police. After the investigation takes place, it is up to the Fatality Review Board to determine whether or not they wish to have an inquiry. Now, as the Minister of Justice I do have the authority, if I so determine it to be necessary, to order an inquiry. However, it's premature to be making that commitment at this stage. Let's have the criminal investigation completed. Once that's done, if charges are not pursued, then let the Fatality Review Board take a look at the matter.

MS OLSEN: Criminal court does not make recommendations.

My third question is to the Minister of Justice. Have you

spoken with the Solicitor General of Canada so that you can work together to ensure public safety and ensure that the safety of the police officers on the reserves is not compromised by this situation?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, that's a good question. I have not spoken directly with the Solicitor General. However, I know that officials in our department work very closely with the RCMP to ensure that the safety of officers is not compromised. Certainly that's a good question, and I may well pursue that.

Speaker's Ruling Questions about Media Reports

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling on the acting leader of the ND opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the chair chose not to interject prior to this question but would like to remind all hon. members, including the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, of *Beauchesne* 428(e), which says: a question must not "inquire whether statements made in a newspaper are true."

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Electric Utilities Deregulation (continued)

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I tabled copies of a report by a company that's been contracted to manage the Alberta power grid starting in June this year. In doing its due diligence, this company found that as a result of the legislation approved in 1995, the electrical power system in Alberta is a house of horrors. My question is to the Premier. How can the Premier justify advocating the further deregulation of the Alberta electrical system when the partial deregulation that his government pushed through with the support of the Liberals in 1995 is already resulting in a looming crisis, including the likelihood of brown-outs, price hikes, and transmission tower failures?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is the exact reason we're deregulating: to create the climate in this province for more electricity producers to come in. As to the system being "a house of horrors," I've never heard that expression before. Certainly the Liberals don't think it's a house of horrors. I'm at a loss to reply to that particular comment. Perhaps the hon. Minister of Energy can.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I'd be very pleased to have a look at the document that the individual has in his hands. I think he said ESBI. Through an arduous process we have selected ESBI to be the transmission administrator in the province of Alberta to ensure that the system flows smoothly. I'm sure that in their study of how we were going to deregulate and bring all the intricacies of a regulated system into place, they did look at all the trials and tribulations they would have. They are indeed the company that is going to regulate and make sure that the power gets to each and every home in the province of Alberta. They are well renowned. They work in some 80 different locations throughout the world. They are an Irish company. They're well renowned in their ability to formulate and deliver power on a timely basis.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the Premier as well. How can the Premier claim that further deregulation is the answer when the company contracted to clean up the mess blames precisely the deregulation already undertaken for the severe problems in the Alberta electrical system?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that question has been answered, and I would suggest that the hon. member review and examine very carefully the documentation that was filed earlier in this Assembly.

DR. PANNU: My final supplemental, Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: before proceeding with further deregulation, will the Premier commit today to setting up a broad-based task force to hold public consultations and thoroughly review the future of Alberta's electrical system? If not, why not?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, this matter has been under review since 1994. There has been a public review. This review has involved the power companies. It has involved the consumers. It has involved the Industrial Power Consumers Association. It has involved mayors and Reeves of various municipalities, municipal districts, and counties throughout the province. There has been an extensive public consultation process. Why on earth would we put the people of Alberta to the time and the expense of going through another public consultation process after four years of full-blown public consultation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

Palliser Grain Co. Ltd.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On March 16 the Canadian Grain Commission failed to extend the grain dealer licence for Palliser Grain Co. Ltd. of Calgary. I understand that the letters of credit from the small grain dealers' program now administered by the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation are still extended to the Canadian Grain Commission on behalf of Palliser Grain. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Could he explain why the Canadian Grain Commission pulled the licence of Palliser Grain?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Palliser Grain Co. had been in some financial difficulty for quite some time, and they weren't able to work out a successful, workable plan providing AFSC additional security. As a result, AFSC was not in a position to renew the letters of credit beyond May 31, 1998.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. Farmers who had dealings with Palliser are concerned that they may be at risk for nonpayment of recent transactions. What can the minister advise these farmers to do?

MR. STELMACH: The letters of credit were filed with the Canadian Grain Commission to protect the producers. To extend the letters beyond May 31, 1998, would have put producers at much greater risk. As a result, my suggestion to the producers is to work with the Canadian Grain Commission, get in contact with the Grain Commission. I believe they have 30 days, up to April 16, to make their claims. At this particular time I believe that most of their transactions will be covered, but we're working that through the receiver.

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding to the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*, again I really hesitate to interject, but the Canadian Grain Commission falls under federal jurisdiction rather

than provincial jurisdiction, and *Beauchesne* 409(6) says, "A question must be within the administrative competence of the Government," in this case of this government.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Minister of Justice

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In baseball, three strikes and you're out, but our Justice minister is still standing at the plate swinging at strikes when he really ought to be warming a bench in the dugout. Only with this government do bad judgment, bad deal-making, and huge taxpayer losses get you promoted into cabinet. My first question to the Premier this afternoon: how does the Premier justify his stated confidence in a minister who made the deal with Millar Western that cost taxpayers a \$244 million loss, since it was this minister who was this government's agent and lawyer in that deal?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. minister did a good job in light of a very bad circumstance. He did not negotiate the original deal. What he did is he got us out of a bad deal.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, how does this Premier justify his stated confidence in a minister who made the deal on the Swan Hills waste treatment plant, which cost taxpayers \$441 million and counting?

MR. KLEIN: Again, it was one of those deals that was done by a former government, and this hon. minister, when he was a private member, was assigned to negotiate a deal to get us out of the business of hazardous waste management. I think that under the circumstances he did a remarkable job.

MR. DICKSON: Finally, Mr. Speaker, if \$851 million in taxpayer losses doesn't bother the Premier, I'll ask him: how does he justify his confidence in a minister who simply cannot draft legislation that adequately protects the rights of the most vulnerable Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member wax eloquent the other day about lawyers and how great they are and how much they contribute to society, and I agree with him. I agree with him. There are some fine lawyers. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo is undoubtedly amongst the fine lawyers of this province, and I believe that the hon. Minister of Justice is amongst the fine lawyers of this province. There are some others in the Liberal caucus who belong to the legal professional. There are others in our caucus who belong to the legal profession. I think that they're all fine people.

Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of lawyers involved in this particular case: lawyers from outside; lawyers from Burnet Duckworth, where I'm sure there are few Liberals; lawyers from Macleod Dixon, where I'm sure there are a few Liberals; lawyers from within the province's Justice department, where I'm sure there are a few Liberals as well. We don't discriminate.

Again I reiterate what was said I think it was now going on two weeks ago, that we as a caucus took the advice of lawyers. We didn't have our political hats on. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the right thing was done. The right thing was done, and that's what politics is all about: ultimately doing the right thing.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the comments that have been made relative to my hon. colleague, I will have the Minister of Justice respond, because I think he needs to say something about these attacks. [applause]

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Premier, and thank you, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, over the past two weeks I think that quite clearly I've accepted responsibility with respect to what occurred regarding Bill 26. I admitted that I had made a mistake.

I'm prepared, however, at this stage to move forward and put it behind me, yet before doing so, Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on why I believe we are over here as government and why those members are over there as opposition. It is because when we make a mistake, we are prepared to accept responsibility for that mistake. Conversely, the opposition tactic is typically to avoid responsibility, as the Leader of the Opposition did during the Principal Group inquiry. Responses such as: I don't recall; I don't remember; I was out getting a coffee when the decision was made. Those are the norm for the opposition, and this is why I believe that they will remain in opposition and we will remain as government.

Speaker's Ruling

Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, that was the third occasion today in which the chair has chosen not to interject so as to ensure that there is an orderly flow in question period. But may I draw all members' attention to *Beauchesne* 410(16), which says, "Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios." That last series of questions did not deal with a current portfolio. That's the third time I chose not to interject.

We've only had six questions at this point in time. I would have had to interject three times to rule three sets of questions out of order, which would suggest to me that perhaps later today or tomorrow morning all members might really want to read some of this *Beauchesne* business and find out what questions are appropriate. The way we're going is that half the questions would be ruled out, and all you would get in question period is interjections by the Speaker. He does not want to do that.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

O'Brien Provincial Park

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some 15 kilometres south of Grande Prairie is O'Brien provincial park. This day-use park is approximately 160 acres in size, is adjacent to the Wapiti River, and contains both conifer and deciduous trees that are over 100 years in age. During 1997 this park was used by over 19,000 residents of the area. My questions are all to the Minister of Environmental Protection. Firstly, will the minister please explain his plan for the future of this park?

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This park is indeed a very well-used and important park to us. As the hon. member described, it's in a beautiful setting, and certainly we're very anxious to continue to see its operation.

We have over the last number of years been moving to facility operators and to contracting out a lot of the services that are required in our park system. As a matter of fact, up to last year some 92 percent of the recreation facilities within the province had been either privatized or were under contract. We have been working to try to find a contractor for this particular park. I must

tell the hon. member that it is difficult because there is a very high-use day-use area in the park, and of course it is the government's policy that we will not permit charging for the use of a day-use area. Without that charge, of course, facility operators have difficulty generating revenue. But there are individuals interested in operating it. We've had corporate entities that have been showing some interest, and I'm very confident that we will in fact come up with a solution that is acceptable to everyone.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister please confirm that since 1995 the Grande Prairie Young Offender Centre has been providing labour for park maintenance at no cost to the department of environment? [interjections]

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, that seems to really strike a nerve over there with the opposition. I'm very proud that the young offenders from Grande Prairie have been cutting grass and picking up garbage and all of that sort of thing in the park. We're very anxious to provide that opportunity for some of the residents of these facilities, because in fact it gives them something to do and gives them some esteem. So I think it's great that we're doing it, and yes, we have been doing it.

2:10

MR. JACQUES: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the fact that the young offender centre is eager to provide labour at no cost to the department and given the fact that it only costs the department \$6,200 a year to operate that park, only 30 cents per visitor, will the minister guarantee that O'Brien provincial park will continue to operate as a day park in 1998?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said in answer to my first question, we have a lot of interest by individuals and corporate sponsors to operate the park. It may sound to the big spenders on the opposition side that \$6,200 is not a lot of money, but in very tight budgets and with oil prices where they are, we have to watch every penny we spend. So we are going to let the process work, and I'm very confident that we will have an operator operating that park this summer.

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

West Edmonton Diabetes Clinic

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, up until December of 1996 diabetics who lived close to the Misericordia hospital in Edmonton had access to a specialist clinic to deal with their unique medical needs. Now due to budget cuts and staff reductions, the specialist has moved his clinic to a nonhospital site. Unfortunately, none of the money required to pay for nurse/educators and dieticians followed the doctor to his new clinic. My question is to the Minister of Health. Why won't the minister fund the Capital health authority to specifically pay for diabetes treatment, education, and counseling outside of a hospital setting?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the particular location of clinics and services within the Capital health region is overall a planning responsibility of the Capital health authority. Of course, with respect to physicians and their particular practices, there is considerable choice available there as far as physicians.

With respect to the specifics the member is referring to, I am not apprised of the details or the circumstances of the change that

he outlines. However, in the broad picture, Mr. Speaker, there has been an additional effort overall in the province through our funding of provincial services to expand diabetes treatments. There are expanded satellite clinics across the province, and we're doing a much higher volume of work and treatment in that area than was the case previously.

MR. SAPERS: The RHA has told the doctor to contact Alberta Health.

Given that the nonhospital west Edmonton clinic can operate at approximately 50 percent of the cost of the old clinic in the Misericordia hospital, half the cost, how can the Minister of Health justify the spending of more money to provide less service to Edmonton area diabetics?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the figures the hon. member is quoting are correct, it would seem that the operation of the clinic at a lesser cost – there's nothing particularly wrong with that. He has referred to certain specific program items relative to training and other support services. I think that in fairness to the Capital health authority, they should have an opportunity to explain their rationale, and perhaps this is something that involves – if we're talking about training vis-à-vis the faculty of medicine, it is something that needs to be worked out with them as well.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I am concerned and supportive of the best possible service in the Capital region in this particular area, but these are specifics that one needs to be apprised of before being able to answer further.

MR. SAPERS: Given that the report on diabetes education and care calls for an expansion of outpatient community programs, will the Minister of Health commit to working with the Capital health authority, the Alberta Medical Association, and other stakeholders to resolve this issue and ensure the maintenance of an efficient and effective outpatient diabetes clinic in west Edmonton?

MR. JONSON: Generally, Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated and I'd like to emphasize, there has been an expansion of the overall effort in this province in the area of diabetes treatment. Now, with respect to Edmonton . . .

MR. SAPERS: Not in Edmonton.

MR. JONSON: The hon. member shouts, "Not in Edmonton." I think we need to know the overall picture and the overall plan with respect to the Capital health authority and diabetes treatment before we make such categorical statements. That is something that certainly I will inquire with respect to, but I don't think that certain conclusions should be reached until we know and have a response from the Capital health authority.

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

Health Care Premiums

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health. A constituent of mine by the name of Mr. Ian Walker is a well-respected, well-informed, and well-involved senior citizen. Mr. Walker heard the Prime Minister of Canada saying that Canadians do not pay health care premiums. Mr.

Walker told me to tell the minister that the last time he checked, Alberta was still a part of Canada. So since the majority of Canadians do not pay health care premiums, why do Albertans pay health care premiums?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are two provinces in this country – mind you, they are located somewhat distant from Ottawa. They are British Columbia and Alberta. Further, I think it's very important to be able to point out that in terms of the overall tax or premium burden, I think Alberta compares, as well documented by the Provincial Treasurer, very, very well with the rest of Canada. I think we have to look at the overall costs charged by government to the citizens of the province. But, yes, there was a policy decision made quite a number of years ago to charge premiums in this province, and we are one of two provinces that do so.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since Albertans pay health care premiums, why are they not tax deductible as the private insurance premiums are?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the health care premiums are regarded as a public charge for a public system. I think it's important also to note that in our overall premium program, we have a number of exemptions from premiums, subsidies for premiums, particularly with respect to our seniors population. This is something that would not fit very well with a tax deductible approach. The other thing, however, is that if the hon. member were to look into it, I think he would find that private insurance company premiums are only deductible if the premium is over 3 percent of an individual's net income.

MR. AMERY: Mr. Speaker, could the minister tell Mr. Walker and other Albertans: how much money does the Alberta government receive from the federal government for health care on a per capita basis?

MR. JONSON: We receive, Mr. Speaker, about \$444 million, \$445 million in terms of a health transfer payment. I believe if we divide that by our population of 2.7 million, 2.8 million, it comes out to an amount of about \$143, \$145 per capita. On the other hand, as a province the per capita contribution to health overall in this province is around \$1,430 per capita.

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

Endangered Species

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Environmental Protection is setting up the Endangered Species Conservation Committee to advise him on the threatened or endangered species that need protection under the Wildlife Act. One would expect such a committee to have a range of experts on endangered species, but not in Alberta. While many stakeholder groups have been invited onto the committee, there's almost no one with expertise on endangered species. The existing committee is so biased that even the forest representatives are embarrassed. Why did the minister not select a committee that included a range of experts on endangered species?

2:20

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I didn't get the second question. But

the fact is that there are two committees. There's a committee that works nationally and identifies the species that would be classified as at risk or endangered. The committee we are setting up is the committee that will work on the recovery plans and plans that will deal with the protection of the habitat and how it could be managed so that in fact the specie will survive. This is something that Alberta is taking somewhat of a lead on in Canada. We were one of the first to pass legislation within our Wildlife Act to include endangered and at-risk species, and setting up this committee is just part of fulfilling that legislation.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister can tell me this: what good does passing legislation do when you have no experts to advise you on who it is that's endangered and who should be included on the list?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again I get somewhat offended with those kinds of comments because within the staff of Environmental Protection we do have a number of experts, and those folks will be advising the committee as they set up the management plans.

MS CARLSON: Given that there are no experts on this list, that just being able to advise them on the species isn't enough, will the minister here today commit to put some experts on that committee, which is what the committee's asking for?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, there are two committees. There's a committee that looks at it nationally and looks at the various species. Those folks identify the species that should be on the list, and when you start dealing with the habitat and what is necessary for the specie to survive and multiply, then we need to have ordinary people that are working in the field and be advised by experts. We have those experts within the Department of Environmental Protection, and they will be giving their advice on how best to manage these habitats.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glangarry.

HIV Testing of Pregnant Women

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Health. The government announced yesterday that it's going to start to routinely test all pregnant women in Alberta for HIV. Is this being done, hon. minister, because the department has noted a significant increase in the number of women who have passed on the virus to their unborn children?

MR. JONSON: No, Mr. Speaker, that is not the reason for this particular policy change as reported in the announcement of yesterday. The really important factor here is that with advances in treatment, particularly with respect to drug therapy, it is now possible to prevent the transfer of the virus to the child in about 70 percent of the cases. That major, major health advancement is something that we feel we have a responsibility to capitalize upon. Therefore, since there is a treatment available, albeit not 100 percent, but certainly a major, major, major improvement, it's only a responsible thing to make this testing available.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, if this testing will truly decrease the number of children born at risk, why are we not making the test mandatory?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in the course of developing this particular policy, we consulted with a number of stakeholders, including the Alberta Medical Association. The overall advice is that we should make it universally available across the province as part of routine prenatal testing but we should not make it compulsory. The overall assessment of people who work in that area and are in contact with the users of the system as far as pregnancies and births are concerned advise that this would be the most acceptable way and the way that would get the most overall participation.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, is testing for hepatitis B, German measles, and syphilis done on pregnant women routinely, and if so, is this done voluntarily or on a mandatory basis?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the statistics I think indicate that about 48,000 to 50,000 women in the province are pregnant each year. This overall initiative is designed to make sure that we have overall coverage, that we have a service available to all the people that want to avail themselves of it. I think this is the way to proceed. It's important to note that the other package of tests that has been previously available, such as testing for hepatitis B, those too were done on a voluntary basis.

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

Advanced Education Institutions

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, the minister of advanced education has said that performance-based funding will promote leadership and innovation amongst Alberta's postsecondary institutions. However, leadership seems to be lacking at both Lakeland College and Red Deer College, especially when it comes to the minister's handpicked board of governors. Recently the Alberta College-Institute Faculties Association informed the minister of this problem when they sent him the results of its annual survey of its 4,500 members. To the minister: what will the minister be doing about the fact that according to the survey 70 percent of Lakeland College's faculty do not have any confidence in their current president and an incredible 84 percent lack confidence in the college's board of governors?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we're of course familiar with the information that's been provided. As the minister I think we have a very good relationship with the faculty association – association of associations, I guess we can call it – that did the study. Yes, there are some situations at Lakeland College that we're looking at. We've been out there to talk to the folks, and we're putting some things in place.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, will the minister be doing anything to rectify the fact that two-thirds of Red Deer College's faculty do not believe their institution supports open and honest communication?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, once again, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to indicate to all of the members here in the Legislative Assembly that we have 26 publicly funded institutions here in the province and that as of this date I think I've been able to visit 23 of them. I'm going to have the honour of visiting Grande Prairie very shortly. One of the things that we try to make sure we do when we visit those institutions is that we do deal with the faculty and

that we're able to hear some of the concerns that have been raised. We hope that the groups that represent faculty associations will continue to do their surveys, because it provides us with meaningful input.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, since these results are amongst the poorest recorded in the six years that the faculty association has been collecting data, will the minister commit to immediately meet with both the administration and faculty of these institutions to ensure these serious levels of management dissension do not inhibit the quality of student programs?

2:30

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think I already answered that, Mr. Speaker, the fact that we are meeting and will continue to meet.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Three hon. members have indicated their interest to participate today. We'll go in this order. First of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Bishop Paul O'Byrne

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This month in Calgary there was a special event which I attended. It was the official retirement of Bishop Paul O'Byrne and the installation of his replacement, Bishop Frederick Henry.

Bishop Paul O'Byrne served as a priest for 50 years and as bishop of Calgary for 30 years. Bishop Paul was always approachable and willing to help everybody to resolve issues. He was amiably known as the people's bishop, ministering to over 200,000 Roman Catholics in the Calgary diocese. Bishop O'Byrne served on many commissions of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops across the nation, such as social affairs, Christian education, missions, and social communications. He was the president of the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics Inter-Faith Outreach Committee and a signatory of a historic ecumenical agreement of co-operation among Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans.

During his ministry he encouraged and supported many volunteer initiatives to help people with high needs and to support the improvement of quality of life in the Calgary region. These initiatives were in partnership with municipal, provincial, and federal governments to resolve social issues, from existing social ills to the difficulties facing newcomers to Calgary.

Chief Justice Ken Moore of Calgary, a boyhood friend of Bishop Paul O'Byrne, wrote about their growing up in the neighbourhood together:

Paul O'Byrne grew up – but not too high – in the Scarboro district of West Calgary. He was nicknamed Pee Wee. But he was a package of dynamite when playing football or hockey. Paul was the catalyst, the organizer, the peace maker. Simply, he was a leader. He never said an unkind word about anyone.

Helen Gough, 96 years old, living in Calgary, a first-grade school teacher of Bishop O'Byrne, wrote:

I am appreciative and proud to have kept in touch with the little boy who grew into a distinguished man representing our Church.

I would like to ask all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating Bishop Paul O'Byrne on his retirement and thanking him for his work for the betterment of Albertans.

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

Hospital Support Workers' Strike

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hospital support workers provide vital services without which the entire health care system would grind to a halt. This includes maintenance services to keep the mechanical systems functioning and operating rooms and ICUs running smoothly. This further includes reliable provision of laundry services, food preparation services, and housekeeping services.

The strike by Capital health authority hospital support workers last Friday was not mainly about money, even though these workers are the lowest paid of all health care workers. What the strike was about was keeping the modest-paying jobs from being contracted out at the whim of the employer. What the strike was about was stopping the race to the bottom whereby public employees earning modest wages are replaced by low-paid, often part-time jobs with no benefits. It took a lot of courage for the hospital workers to walk out on their life's calling, knowing they faced the possibility of heavy fines or even jail. I salute these workers for taking a stand and telling this government that people deserve to be paid a decent and living wage for an honest day's work.

I also commend the Capital health authority for its last-minute recognition that the workers deserve some protection from their jobs being contracted out to the lowest bidder. Unfortunately I can give no credit whatsoever to this Conservative government that's been in the forefront in this race to the bottom. I know that this government has modeled itself after the privatization experiments that took place in New Zealand earlier this decade. But guess what, Mr. Speaker? Under its new coalition government New Zealand is changing course. I quote from a health policy agreement signed by the New Zealand coalition government partners. It's as follows:

The Coalition Government's health policy has the over-riding goal of ensuring [that] principles of public service replace commercial profit objectives for all public provided health and disability services.

I say hallelujah. This gives me hope that the privatization/deregulation madness will come to a halt one day, hopefully soon, even in the province of Alberta.

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

Grace Women's Health Centre

MRS. LAING: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, yesterday at the Grace Women's Health Centre located in Calgary-Bow I had the privilege to be present at the unveiling of state-of-the-art equipment known as the breast biopsy unit and the recognition of TransAlta Corporation's partnership with the Grace Women's Health Centre. This partnership is an extraordinary example of corporate and community co-operation, working together to address the important issues of women's health.

Breast cancer, the most common female cancer, is the number two leading cause of cancer death among female Albertans and the leading killer of middle-aged Alberta women. The breast biopsy unit is leading-edge technology and was purchased with funds provided by TransAlta Corporation. This unit will provide women that traditionally required surgery with a less painful biopsy procedure. This is truly a remarkable technological advance and will be an asset in detecting the deadly disease and allow for early diagnosis, which will serve as a prelude to early treatment.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the contribution of one of Calgary's leading corporate citizens. TransAlta made a contribution of \$500,000 to the Partners in Health campaign, which helped buy the breast biopsy unit. Their partnership with the Grace Women's Health Centre reveals a strong commitment to women's health. I would also like to take the opportunity to commend the incredible work of the Grace Women's Health Centre and Partners in Health for their positive contribution in creating world-class health care in Alberta.

In closing, I would just like to mention that many of the recommendations coming out of the Growth Summit indicated that business, government, and community must work in co-operation to provide for the needs of society. This partnership is a perfect example of this co-operation and goes a long way to improving women's health care in Alberta. In concert with the Alberta Cancer Board's plan to screen 80 percent of the target age group for breast cancer, yesterday's announcement was a positive step in further reducing the mortality rate of Alberta women by early diagnosis of breast cancer.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling Orders of the Day, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 16 students from all over the world that are joining us here in Alberta to experience some advantages of living here and learning to speak English. They are students from the Alberta Vocational College in the English as a Second Language program, and they are in the public gallery here, sir. They are accompanied by Ivan Sundal, their teacher, and I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Bill 210
Protection of Personal Information
in the Private Sector Act

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to stand this afternoon and move second reading of Bill 210, Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector Act.

We stand in Alberta on the cusp of a brand-new frontier, a frontier of information rights for individual citizens. Bill 210 is an attempt to ensure that Albertans are not left behind, an attempt to ensure that Albertans are at the very front edge of this frontier. The changes in front of us require a legislative response which will be as bold, a response which will be as historic, as Alberta's development of our homestead legislation in the 1870s.

Mr. Speaker, I mention the homestead legislation because when

one looks at the history of development in this province, there were many milestones that took us qualitatively much further ahead in terms of developing as a province, and I have always thought of the homestead act as one of those cornerstones. Well, I'd say that the challenge we currently confront with the management of data about personal information, about individual Canadians, individual Albertans represents the same kind of challenge. The question will be whether we as legislators will be able to come up with as creative a response as the government that was then managing the territory that has come to be Alberta did in 1870.

What I want to do is spend a few moments sketching some elements of this new frontier. Mr. Speaker, eight other provinces in Canada have some form of access to information law, perhaps not as strong as the freedom of information law that we have in this jurisdiction but, nonetheless, some statutory provision which addresses personal information privacy. The federal Privacy Act of 1985 applies to all federal departments, most federal agencies, and some Crown corporations. These developments all relate to information held by public bodies. We stand poised in 1998 to address information held about us and our constituents by private corporations, nonpublic bodies.

2:40

What I wanted to do in the next moment is just sketch six really major developments that give some context to Bill 210 and the reason why I talk about this as posing as big a challenge as the settlement of Alberta did at the end of the last century. Quebec is already ahead of us. That province has comprehensive legislation which covers personal information held by the private sector. The second thing I wanted to touch on is that back in 1984 this nation, Canada, signed the OECD guidelines on the protection of privacy and transborder flow of personal data.

In 1995, in a major step forward, the European Union enacted a directive. It's usually referred to as the EU directive, but the proper title is: a directive on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data. The EU privacy directive provides that transfers of information – and this is the thing that should be particularly important to a trading entity, a trading jurisdiction like Alberta – can be blocked if that information is being transferred to nonmember states that do not provide legislated privacy protection. In the words of an Industry Canada publication: this directive has the potential to make the protection of personal information a major, nontariff barrier with Canada. The reason for that, Mr. Speaker, is that Quebec is the only jurisdiction in Canada that complies with the EU directive.

Mr. Speaker, the last time I looked – and I stand to be corrected on the number because I'm sure it's been revised – as a province we typically export in a given year about \$700 million of products and services to western European nations. Some may say that that's small potatoes, that that's not something we should worry about. But we have a Department of Economic Development and an Intergovernmental Affairs department that I can tell you right now are focusing on a whole host of issues that have a less dramatic monetary impact on jobs and on investment in this province than the EU privacy directive has.

The third item I just wanted to mention by way of background is the International Organization for Standardization, which in May of 1996 passed a resolution supported by 25 nations for a proposal to develop an international standard on privacy. This is based on a model the Canadian Standards Association has developed.

DR. WEST: Is Zimbabwe in it?

MR. DICKSON: I'm talking about western industrialized countries. We may have ministers who don't have any idea of the import of the EU privacy directive. I'd be embarrassed.

The only growth industry Albertans are interested in, Mr. Speaker, is being able to trade to western European nations, and they don't want to see their trade opportunities limited, curbed because this Legislature, the men and women who were elected to reduce barriers, the men and women who were elected to facilitate international trade, because we were asleep at the switch, because we had our head in the sand and we didn't understand the importance of what was going on in the world around us.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Standards Association code that in fact has been developed in this country has been unanimously supported by groups as diverse as American Express and the Canadian Labour Congress, by Equifax Canada, by the Insurance Bureau of Canada. But that code is only a voluntary code; there are no sanctions for compliance. The reality is that the CSA standard, as much currency as it's attracting, doesn't meet the minimum requirements of the European Union directive, so that doesn't provide any comfort to people in this province. We should all be interested in this in terms of being able to export and trade in western Europe.

Now, the government of Canada, specifically the Department of Justice and the Department of Industry, in fact hosted a conference just a month ago looking at legislative options. In September of 1996 the Justice minister of Canada confirmed the federal government's intention to legislate by the year 2000, and that process is now under way. I've only mentioned four of the major events by way of context. At this point I want to ask members: do we want to simply wait for the federal government? Do we have to wait for the federal government to bring in an item of legislation? Would it not be most appropriate, since property and civil rights are matters within the exclusive legislative competence of the province of Alberta, would it not make more sense for Alberta legislators to move on this? Would it not make more sense for us to see the kinds of international trends and national trends that are going on, anticipate where they're going to take us, and move by providing leadership?

We have the opportunity as a province to be on the cutting edge of privacy protection. We have the opportunity to craft the rules that are going to govern international commerce, at least for Alberta businesses. Frankly, because a lot is not being done in other provinces right now, we have the opportunity to provide a kind of leadership which in fact can translate to having a big impact in other provinces as well as foreign jurisdictions. I just say to any member: if you're comfortable with waiting for the federal government to legislate potentially in areas where they have no competence to legislate, if you're prepared to wait for international export agencies and the European Union to tell businesses in your constituencies what the rules ought to be, then you ought not to support this bill. Instead, we'll put our heads back in the sand, wait until the EU goes into effect, and wait until people show up at our constituency offices and our ministerial offices saying: why didn't you see this coming?

A moment ago we talked in this House about the year 2000 problems. Well, you know, this is the same kind of challenge. We can see it coming. It has some definition. We understand what the challenge is. The issue is: what kinds of tools do we give Alberta businesses to be able to combat, to be able to cope and respond to that?

Well, I'll say immodestly that Bill 210 is an attempt in that direction. I'm not suggesting that this is the perfect product. I'm not suggesting that this is the very best that the bright men and women in this Legislature can come up with, but I offer it as a platform, I offer it as an opportunity, I offer it as a forum for those of us in this Legislature who are concerned about international trade, who are concerned about ensuring that Alberta is at the front edge in all areas, not just in deficit cutting.

Mr. Speaker, there are two other elements I wanted to mention briefly. Health information. Currently we see this as part of the context in which we have to view Bill 210. Bill 30 was introduced in the Legislature. The Minister of Health wisely – and I praise him in this respect – withdrew the bill, recognizing that it requires substantial revision and modification, but it's coming back. The anticipation is, Mr. Speaker, that the bill will likely be back in the spring of 1999 if not before.

2:50

In Manitoba they've passed a health information law. In Ontario they've introduced a bill roughly similar to Bill 30. In Saskatchewan they've introduced a health information law, and in British Columbia it's under active consideration. In each one of these jurisdictions what we're talking about is governments recognizing the importance of dealing with, in this case, health information in the nongovernmental sector. On top of all that, there's a federal task force right now, co-chaired by Dr. Tom Noseworthy of the University of Alberta, which is looking at developing a federal response around health information and privacy issues.

The sixth circumstance, which is part of the context and the landscape, if you will, around this issue, is the three-year review of our freedom of information act. One of the issues live in that discussion will be whether our freedom of information act should be expanded to include the private sector. British Columbia is doing a four-year review of their freedom of information statute currently. They're holding public hearings, and one of the things they're looking at is a further expansion of rules into the private sector. So that's part of the context that I think members ought to be alive to.

I wrote the bill that's currently in front of us in 1995. It was introduced in 1996 in the Legislature by a former colleague of mine as Bill 204. The bill was defeated at second reading. There is a federal bill, Bill C-315, that was introduced in the House of Commons a couple of years ago, also addressing the protection of information in the private sector. The only significant change from the 1996 bill to Bill 210 is the addition of provisions dealing with video surveillance. Now, I'll come back and talk about that in a moment.

One interesting thing I want to report on to my colleagues in the House is the view of our Information and Privacy Commissioner. There's something of an interesting metamorphosis here. Mr. Clark initially took the view publicly and privately that there was not a need for legislated privacy protection in the nongovernmental sector. We agreed to disagree about that, but as Mr. Clark has developed further expertise and further experience in his role, he has now come to a position consistent with many others and now acknowledges that there is a need for legislated privacy protection. I'm not going to represent that the Privacy Commissioner, if he had a vote, is voting for Bill 210. His comment to me was that this is something Albertans ought to be engaged in, and there should be broad public consultation around this. I'm not wanting to put his position any stronger than that, but he does acknowledge the need for legislated privacy protection.

Mr. Speaker, I keep on trying to offer good advice to my colleagues in the Legislature in terms of anticipating that freight train coming around the corner, but there are some members that prefer to stand with hands clasped, back turned to the oncoming locomotive, and pretend it's not going to hit us. Well, when we come to vote on second reading, members will have that option of deciding whether they, too, want to stand on the train tracks, hands clasped, back to the oncoming locomotive or whether they want to turn around and face it, decide how fast it's coming, and decide whether they're going to step to the left or the right and do whatever else is required to avoid demolition.

What we're talking about, members, is Alberta business interests. This isn't some ethereal notion, simply a privacy protection. There is a compelling commercial interest. I say that not because I think that's the most important reason for supporting Bill 210 but because it's something that I would expect will resonate with a number of members in the Chamber who may not be particularly supportive of information rights or privacy rights which are developing in Canada.

One of the things that I want to acknowledge as well – since this bill has been reintroduced in the Assembly, I received a good deal of information, which I'll be organizing and tabling in the Legislature, from the Canadian Bankers Association, from the direct marketers in this country, from a number of businesspeople who have a number of issues. But, you know, what I find fascinating is that the people like the banks and the insurance companies are, as is often the case, frankly far ahead of government in this respect. They spend a lot of time looking at international and national trends, and once again I think they're showing in many respects that they're a step ahead of us. They understand the need for a response. The real question will be whether the 83 men and women in this Chamber are able to take that same message and look at some appropriate response. I say again that I'm happy to take advice from members in any quarter of the House in terms of how we can take this platform or vehicle, which is really what Bill 210 is, and craft the strongest, most appropriate kinds of rules possible.

I just want to address again – I remember that the Member for Medicine Hat, when this bill came forward several years ago, said at the time that we don't need it, that he's uncomfortable dealing with the private sector. What I wanted to do was just quote a very brief section from a submission that was made by the Privacy Commissioner of Canada. It was a report prepared by Gowling, Strathy and Henderson in Ottawa for the Privacy Commissioner. This was a presentation to the Standing Senate Committee on Banking, Trade and Commerce in 1992, an outstanding document in terms of information for members interested in doing their own research on this. This is the submission that appears in the executive summary.

There are both common law and statutory protections that help ensure the privacy of personal information in certain relationships within the private sector. However, without comprehensive privacy protection, proposals such as those contained in section 5 of the Insurance Business Regulations . . . could allow exchanges of information between banks and insurance companies without clients' knowledge or consent. The regulations state only what personal information may not be transferred – not what may. Privacy principles require that the transaction be transparent to the consumer.

There's a lot of other very useful analysis in the report, which I'm not going to spend more time dealing with. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to further stages to develop the argument further.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to speak to Bill 210, Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector Act, 1998. The protection of personal information is indeed important, and the use of that information concerns me, as it concerns many people these days. I am uncomfortable with the idea that every time I use my debit card, make a purchase with a Visa card, or accept an extended warranty on a purchase, which usually requires giving out personal information, there is an instant record, and that information could be accessed by any number of people across the country.

As discussed in the federal discussion paper, Building Canada's Information Economy in Society, these transactions

leave a data trail that can be compiled to provide a detailed record of our personal history and preferences. The digitization of health, education, employment and consumer records makes it possible to combine information and create an individual profile with data that most of us consider to be extremely personal. This information may be sent across provincial and national borders where it can be sold, reused or integrated with other databases without our knowledge or consent.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I am uncomfortable thinking about that possibility. It is for these reasons that I appreciate the merit of the bill before us, and I appreciate many of the comments that were made by the mover of this bill as well. Bill 210, the Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector Act, is on the right track.

3:00

It has been clearly established that we must look at protecting our personal information. Alberta took that first step in 1994 with the passing of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. This act, which came into force in October 1995, as was previously mentioned, underlines the principle that all government departments, boards, agencies, or offices – referred to as public bodies – are required to make appropriate information accessible for public inquiry and use. This act deals directly with the protection of privacy in terms of regulation of the manner in which a public body collects, uses, and discloses personal information in its custody, allowing individuals the right to access information about themselves held by a public body and allowing individuals to correct personal information held by a public body.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, on February 26, 1998, the province of New Brunswick passed the very same type of legislation to protect the collection and use of personal information by public bodies. The point I'm trying to make is that the awareness that there is a need for the protection of personal information certainly does exist.

I realize that the examples I have just given encompass information gathered by public bodies, but the concern is certainly not limited to this sector, and steps are being taken to look at the private sector as well. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in Alberta provides for a review committee to be struck three years following the implementation of the act, and as it is now three years since its implementation, it is the purpose of an all-party committee to review the legislation as it has been applied. Recently we saw the appointment of the Select Special Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act Review Committee of the Legislative Assembly. As I mentioned, members from both sides of this Assembly sit on this committee.

The other point I'd like to make and, I should add, one of the

reasons why I'm not able to support this bill is that the federal government has made a commitment to protect our personal information. It is clear that technological advancements have rendered our current protection as no longer sufficient. The federal government has pledged to deal with the matter of personal information, and steps have been taken to begin a process that will determine the most effective way to achieve the best protection for our information while at the same time allowing us to be competitive in the global marketplace.

As I have stated, Mr. Speaker, our personal information can be shared across borders. In fact, it is often not a case of sharing but rather having our information sold, thus transferring it across borders to other provinces and even other countries. Therefore, we need a national program to provide standards for protection. Realistically, we know that this process will take some time to complete, but in actual fact, until such time when the process is completed, there does exist a standard in place to assist us with the protection of personal information in the private sector.

In 1984 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development issued international privacy standards, and Canada immediately signed on as a participant. In 1990 Canada took these standards one step further. The federal government, along with member groups in private industry, wanted to do more than the OECD international privacy standards had done. Federal and Intergovernmental Affairs and member groups of Canadian private industry met with the federal government to discuss how to better handle the area of protection of personal information. As a result, the Canadian Standards Association approved a model code for the protection of personal information as a national standard of Canada on December 12, 1995. Due to the fact that government and private industry called for these new standards, this model code is voluntary, as was mentioned, and is based on the belief that enough private groups called for it that therefore its implementation will be widespread across the country.

This code offers a complete set of principles for companies and organizations with access to personal data to follow until the commitment is fulfilled by the federal government. Now, these principles include those such as accountability for information taken from an individual, limiting the collection of information to that which is necessary, accuracy of information taken, and safeguards appropriate to the sensitivity of the information, as well as a number of others.

Mr. Speaker, another point to discuss as we consider Bill 210 is the scope of this bill and who would be affected by it should it be passed into law. The scope would be very narrow as this bill would apply only to the province of Alberta. That in itself may have serious ramifications that we should consider. The model code on the other hand, which private industry across Canada called for, applies from one end of this country to the other. This, as we have already established, is an age where information knows no boundaries. If an organization obtains information in Alberta, that information can easily end up in the hands of another organization in another province. The model code applies to all provinces; Bill 210 does not. Thus we would be doing the Alberta public a disservice by passing a bill that does only in our province what a more far-reaching code achieves for the protection of Albertans' privacy across the country.

Until the federal government has established a universal code, perhaps what we should focus on is educating the Alberta public and Alberta businesses about the model code established by the Canadian Standards Association. Educating the private sector and Albertans on this code would let consumers know that they have

recourse to protecting their own information. It would also let businesses know that there are controls in place to limit how they use the personal information of their clients. Perhaps until the federal/provincial discussions have been completed, this may be an avenue that we should pursue.

Mr. Speaker, as it stands, Bill 210 would place a huge responsibility on the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in terms of cost as well as administration. We can take the example of Quebec, the only province in Canada, as was previously mentioned, with a Private Sector Act. In the year that Quebec implemented the Private Sector Act, its commissioner's office increased from 37 full-time equivalents to 44 full-time equivalents. It would seem to me that this increase in manpower would also mean an increase in cost while not necessarily meaning an increase in efficiency of service nor guaranteeing the protection of personal information in the private sector.

I strongly believe that the most effective way to protect personal information is for the provincial jurisdictions to work together with the federal government in an attempt to establish standards that continue to reach across this country. In fact, we know that these types of discussions are taking place, and therefore I reiterate that the bill is premature and untimely.

I have another concern, Mr. Speaker. Even if we were to consider the implementation of a bill such as Bill 210, is it necessarily the best way to deal with this issue? Would it be most effective to lump the institutions listed in this current bill together and force them to follow the same standards? Would it not be in our best interests to examine other options such as sectoral and company codes? We must also be aware that many companies in Canada have already developed their own privacy codes and monitor their effectiveness on a regular basis.

These sectoral and company codes provide detail and guidance on how legal requirements apply to a specific industry or company. These types of codes can be beneficial in that they allow for industries to explore their own needs for personal information and to show their commitment to privacy by imposing discipline on their own practices.

Another option, which is currently used by the United Kingdom, is the Data Protection Registrar, which must encourage the development of codes. In the Netherlands they have given the privacy commissioner responsibility for approving codes developed by industry. As in the United Kingdom these codes are not binding but do give guidance in interpreting the law. If we look at New Zealand, Mr. Speaker, we see that sectoral codes have the full force of the law. A code in this country may be more or less stringent than the principles set out in the law, but once it has been approved by the privacy commissioner, it replaces those principles.

3:10

Naturally, Mr. Speaker, there would be all kinds of issues to deal with in the adoption of the use of sectoral codes. I'm not suggesting that this is the way to go. I am merely trying to illustrate that there needs to be more extensive consideration given to the protection of personal information in the private sector. There is a need to consult with both the public and the organizations that would be involved or affected by any forthcoming legislation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the members of this Assembly to oppose this bill on the premise that the matter of protecting personal information is being given careful consideration at the federal and provincial levels in a manner that would reflect codes for all of Canada and not for a single province. I

am prepared to wait until the issue of privacy protection in the private sector is done right. This bill rushes the necessary process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to join the debate on Bill 210, the Protection of Personal Information in the Private Sector Act. In survey after survey Canadians have indicated their concern about privacy information. They're worried about the loss of control of information about themselves and their families, and they're concerned that they should have the right to determine when and how and to what extent information about their personal lives is shared with others.

Those of us who were watching the media on the weekend had an example of that when it was reported that a Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce client gave her E-mail address to the bank so that she could receive investment information, and lo and behold, she was sent a list of 500 other clients' E-mail addresses as a result of a mistake on the part of the bank. The personal information that customers had supplied to the bank that they thought was private was certainly not so. So I think it's an example, a very small example and probably not too hurtful an example, of what can happen when private information goes astray. But there are other situations where the sharing of personal information can be very detrimental to an individual's interests.

The privacy of our personal information is related to the other rights that we enjoy: the freedom of expression, the freedom of association. It's related to our very liberty as citizens in this country and how those liberties might be influenced or determined by the release of information about our persons that we wouldn't wish, the kind of information about us that can influence a number of decisions. It could influence the very jobs that we apply for. If health records, mental health records, our personal history were made available, certainly there would be employers who would be influenced by that information in making employment decisions. The very jobs that we qualify for could be influenced by the kind of personal information that was available publicly about us. The benefits that we're eligible for could be influenced by personal information that had been shared with others. I think all of us have a great concern that any information that is held about us and our personal lives is accurate and relevant and that we have some power, some control over how that information and who that information is shared with. So those privacy concerns that not only Albertans but Canadians have identified in a number of different surveys are addressed in the bill that we have before us this afternoon.

The intent of the bill is to set out the kinds of provisions and to control the use of personal information that's held by large private-sector organizations. It limits the ways in which personal information can be used or disclosed by the private body. The bill guarantees the individual's right to access most of the records containing personal information concerning themselves, and it includes the right to request that corrections be made in these records. The bill grants individuals the right to have complaints adjudicated by an independent arbiter. This is a very important aspect of the bill, that there is someone that an individual can appeal to for wrongs to be righted in the collection and the dissemination of private information. It gives Alberta's Information and Privacy Commissioner the authority to issue legally

binding orders. So the intent of the bill I think addresses very clearly the concerns that have been identified by Canadians in terms of their privacy.

We heard from the member opposite. I think there are a number of reasons that make it imperative that the bill be supported. I think we are all aware that the amount of information about ourselves, the amount of information being collected and stored by private bodies has been growing at an almost exponential rate in recent years. You think of the number of evenings you sit at home or try to sit at home, the telephone rings, and it's a group who seem to know a great deal about you asking for donations to a charity, asking you to buy a particular product, and how that kind of solicitation has grown over the years. You start to realize that the amount of information floating around out there about you and your personal lives must be considered.

A lot of that information is in electronic form, and sometimes it's collected without consumers being aware that the information is being collected and pooled in a particular area. I go back to the concerns when we were trying to put together even a simple thing such as the election lists for the last election, and with that being put into electronic form, the kinds of concerns that were raised at that time about the limited amount of personal information that was available in that database. Think of how much more there is if someone had access to personal health information, personal credit information, information about family and family matters. I think the advance of technology – those of us who've tried to work on databases, who've been able to search databases realize how quickly information can be sorted and can be recast and be made use of in a variety of new forms so that you can get very quick snapshots of a particular group of citizens and their needs, their interests, or their weaknesses. Those profiles are being used extensively.

Right now in the commercial world I think of the southwest part of the city where something just as simple as addresses are sorted and the introduction of a new magazine is determined. Those people in the area who will receive the magazine are determined by their income levels. That's done through sorting databases on the computer. So new technologies are increasing the threat from commercial industries and their entities interested in targeting consumers or customers for a particular product or a particular sales pitch. I think Albertans could suffer. I indicated before that one of the concerns that surveys often identify is that people are afraid of the kind of economic and emotion damage they could suffer personally if information about their lives was improperly used or disclosed.

3:20

I think Bill 210 will limit the intrusion by private bodies into private areas of clients' lives by requiring these entities to be able to justify the need for each type of personal information they request. I think at the same time it will give proper authority for the collection of legitimately required information and give customers much stronger reassurance that their privacy will be properly safeguarded. The bill I think tries to strike a balance between allowing customers, allowing individuals to control the kind of information that's out there about them yet in no way impedes legitimate commercial and service industry interests that we would all benefit from as customers. I think that individuals being able to know what personal information about themselves is being held by private bodies is an important aspect of the bill.

I recall not that long ago when school boards were keeping information about students on cumulative records. For years and

years boards resisted making that kind of information available to parents or to outsiders, the argument being then that the kind of information that was included on a student record – information about their health, information about their intelligence levels, information about their academic successes or failures – would be damaging to the family or to outsiders who might acquire it. I think we've come a long way, and I think there's recognition that legitimate access to that information should be allowed. But there are also safeguards put in place by boards to make sure that it's not abused and that truly the interests of students are served in the dissemination of that material.

One of the problems – and we've seen that problem in this Legislature – is that as the government continues to move towards privatization and the contracting out of services, the risk of sensitive information being misused or improperly disclosed rises. I think it was a computer hard drive, which was sold at a government auction, containing health care records that became available to someone who happened to purchase that, and the record hadn't been destroyed. So I think with the move towards deregulation and to privatization and contracting out, the protection of personal information becomes more and more important.

So I think for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, the bill deserves our support. There's a lot more than what I've been able to touch on in these brief few minutes in terms of the strengths of the bill, but I would urge members of the Assembly to support the bill.

Thank you.

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

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 210, a bill that we have established to have some merit. But as mentioned by the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose before me, there are just too many issues that have yet to be considered.

Mr. Speaker, the issues brought forth in Bill 210 are not new. They have been discussed previously and are currently at the forefront of the ongoing federal and provincial discussions on protecting personal information.

MR. DICKSON: Leave it to Ottawa.

MR. AMERY: They are your cousins.

When we reflect on the fact that our technology is advancing at an unstoppable rate, it is clearly illustrated that we must deal with this issue sooner rather than later. Again, Mr. Speaker, I have to stress that there are currently co-operative federal/provincial discussions under way with a view to harmonizing privacy principles across the country. To accept a bill of this nature – that is, Bill 210 – would not only be premature but counterproductive to those initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, a parallel initiative is also being undertaken by the Uniform Law Conference of Canada to prepare a draft uniform law to be considered across jurisdictions. The Uniform Law Conference of Canada is comprised of lawyers from all Canadian jurisdictions. So rather than have legislation that protects personal information in the private sector only in this province, we are working toward uniform legislation that will be applied across this country. It will be well-thought-out legislation based on input from stakeholders across Canada.

The legislation we're looking at in this Bill 210 is premature. At this point consideration is also being given to the protection of personal information, and an attempt for consensus must be made

on how privacy principles should be invoked in the private sector before legislation is put in place. There are those who are advocating legislation, others who are advocating voluntary industry by industry codes, and others advocate a blending of the two. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, these issues must be resolved. It would be irresponsible to push this legislation forward at this time.

This is a complex matter, Mr. Speaker, and a decision is not to be taken lightly or quickly. It is accepted that some protection of personal information is warranted, but it is cautioned that extensive study and public consultation must take place in order to address and consider the implications for both the public and business.

There is one section of this bill that I would like to address specifically, Mr. Speaker, and that is the section of Bill 210 dealing with video surveillance. Discussions surrounding the use of video surveillance are escalating throughout various industries as employers are becoming increasingly concerned with the overall productivity of their employees. There are sometimes questions with the quality of work, possible employee theft, or misuse of company property, and other factors potentially affecting employee productivity, which can in turn be combined with technological advancements and their existence in the workplace to both meet and monitor productivity.

Mr. Speaker, there are numerous methods of surveillance available to monitor the actions and performance of employees. They go beyond video surveillance to searches of computer files, voice mail, E-mail, or other networking communications. Even when we direct our attention to the issues of video surveillance, there are considerations such as whether or not camera installations used will be covert or overt cameras. That is, will they be visible or hidden cameras? Will the cameras be used to observe and document possible criminal or unethical activity such as internal theft, vandalism, espionage, substance abuse, time clock violations, unauthorized or prohibited procedures, or access to company property? Or will they be used to act as a deterrent to criminal and unethical acts such as property or monetary loss in both retail and commercial business, monitoring of entrances, exits, and cash registers, or monitoring and documenting activities from one or more locations on a 24-hour basis if necessary?

This is where the complications start and where my concerns begin. The full intent of this section in the current bill is unclear. Mr. Speaker, is Bill 210 trying to restrict only video surveillance? Would employees be aware that they are working in an environment under surveillance? What about audio collection? Would that be restricted too? There are other questions, such as whether or not private investigation companies, for instance, would be required to ask for the commissioner's permission to engage in their business. Once a permit is given, how does the commissioner propose to satisfy himself or herself that the video . . .

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time limit for this matter is now concluded for today.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions
Multilateral Agreement on Investment**

508. Mr. Dickson on behalf of Ms Leibovici moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to work with the federal government to assure Albertans that the provisions contained within the proposed multilateral agreement on investment, MAI, are consistent

with the principles of quality, accessible, publicly funded Canadian health care, education, and social services, the preservation of high-quality labour and environmental standards, promotion of the development and growth of small- and medium-sized Alberta businesses, and protection of domestic financial institutions prior to giving its approval to the MAI.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased that my colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark had put on the Order Paper Motion 508. It's one that I think speaks to a concern of an increasingly large number of Albertans, and I'm happy to be able to speak to it this afternoon.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If there is another jurisdiction in this country that is as enamoured of for-profit enterprise, I don't know what that would be. I can't identify that jurisdiction. If there is a place where the economic imperative reigns more supreme than it does in this province, I couldn't imagine what that province would be. I think that's why it's so critically important to address the multilateral agreement on investment and to do so in a positive way.

3:30

You know, we just finished hearing - I'm getting a bit of a lesson in terms of approach to leadership. What we've heard, Mr. Speaker, is a number of people saying - this is the proposition we've just heard this afternoon in the Assembly. If the federal government is looking at an issue, we are prepared to entrust it to the federal government. They have occupied the field. We will let the federal government make the rules. We'll let the federal government decide what's appropriate and what's appropriate for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I may well support the federal Liberal Party every four years in a federal election, but I've been elected to represent the interests of Albertans. When there's a conflict between what's happening at the national level or where the federal government is going and what is best for the people in downtown Calgary, my job is to give voice to the concerns of people in downtown Calgary. I just want to reject as unequivocally as possible any notion that because the federal government is addressing an issue, studying a problem, we don't have to raise an Alberta voice, we don't have to offer an Alberta perspective, and we don't have to provide advocacy for what's best for our constituents. It will be interesting to see whether government members are going to take a consistent approach with respect to the MAI and say once again because there's a process under way - now, this is a little different because there is at least some consultation. Our minister of intergovernmental affairs has told us in the House before that this is something the able people in his department are addressing.

Mr. Speaker, the concern continues to be that a lot of Albertans don't have the requisite degree of confidence that discussions behind closed doors of faceless, anonymous bureaucrats talking between jurisdictions will provide the kind of security, the kind of comfort, and indeed the kind of advocacy that Albertans want around something as important as jobs in this province.

What we know is this. I started out saying that this is a province that in 1998 truly has been made in the image of the Minister of Energy. The Minister of Energy has probably carried this province to a point that he only fantasized about many years ago. As we look at for-profit health providers and the kinds of opportunities that are made for those people in this province,

when we look at the opportunity for private schools, when we look at the opportunities for private colleges, is there another jurisdiction in Canada that is prepared to countenance such exultation of the profit motive and so little regard for the public interest?

Mr. Speaker, the motion in front of us says a number of things, but what it's looking for is assurance for Albertans that any provisions contained in the proposed MAI – because it hasn't been executed yet – are “consistent with the principles of quality, accessible, publicly funded Canadian health care, education, and social services” and some other things. Let me just deal with that initially.

Mr. Speaker, I happen to belong to what I still regard to be a significant number of Albertans who still believe that government has a legitimate, acceptable role in terms of providing high-quality, fully accessible services. Whether it's in health care, whether it's in education, or whether it's in social services, that is the only way we will ensure that Alberta children have that equality of opportunity. That's the only way we're going to ensure that an Alberta child born into a high-income or a low-income family will still be assured of getting that kind of an opportunity that presumably every member in this Assembly has already had the benefit of. But that, I think, to many Albertans is in peril now. They're anxious and they're concerned about MAI, and they're not satisfied with the kind of assurances we received from the intergovernmental affairs minister. I don't question his sincerity, but I . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: I question his competence.

MR. DICKSON: No, no. I don't question either the sincerity or the competence of this minister.

But, Mr. Speaker, speaking about “accessible, publicly funded Canadian health care, education, and social services,” there are a lot of specific instances that can be cited. [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have to ask you to rein in the enthusiasm of my colleagues here. This shows you that there are 17 other members of this caucus that can't wait to stand up and speak for fully accessible, publicly funded health care, education, and social services. Because of that, I'm going to cut my comments shorter than I would otherwise. I want to allow constituents around this province to know that they have lots of advocates in this Assembly. They have plenty of people that are prepared . . .

MR. MITCHELL: But none of them on that side.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I think there are some advocates on the other side, but we'll find out in the remaining 50 minutes of debate on this motion. We're going to find out where the advocates are for ensuring those kinds of high-quality, publicly provided services.

Mr. Speaker, you know, my view as an MLA, particularly in the city of Calgary, is that the day you get elected is the start of the next campaign, and the way you campaign is not with buttons and signs. It's listening and giving voice in this Chamber to the concerns of people in our respective constituencies. We have an opportunity in this motion to be able to reflect what we hear from our constituents, so I'm going to be listening keenly to what speakers have to say on this motion from all sides of the House. [interjections] When I retire from this Assembly . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but we seem to have a lively debate here. I would encourage hon. members to the right and on the front bench and hon. members to the left and on the front bench to go outside to the chamber that's without and carry on your discussion there. I will put your name on the speakers' list, but meanwhile we have at this moment the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I was just saying that when the time comes to retire from this Assembly, either voluntarily or involuntarily, the thing I'm going to miss most is the animated and always consistent reaction of the Minister of Energy. It is one of the things I enjoy most in this Assembly. I'm already starting to grieve the loss of that when the time comes to leave this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I think the point I was trying to make, particularly when we deal with health care, is the fact that there is no general exclusion now for social services. There's an undefined exclusion for actions, quote, necessary for maintenance of public order. I think the concern is that there is now a significant portion of Canada's public health care dollars which go into community-based, not-for-profit agencies for delivery of health care services, services that would be available to for-profit corporations as well, including U.S. health management corporations. That's a real concern. I think Albertans have the opportunity to read in periodicals and newspapers what happens with those large, for-profit health organizations in the United States. We cannot afford to give those kinds of organizations the slightest kind of a toehold in Alberta. Pretty soon we're going to forgo that opportunity.

3:40

In law, Mr. Speaker, there's a thing called estoppel, and it goes something like this. If you have an opportunity to raise a concern and you stand by mutely, silently, and do nothing, you may be barred later from coming back and saying, “I didn't agree; I had a problem with it.” We don't want the government of Canada to be estopped from coming back in five or six years and saying, “Hold it,” when U.S. for-profit enterprises move into this province in a big way – into downtown Calgary, downtown Edmonton, downtown Wetaskiwin – and want to set up for-profit organizations to provide private schooling, to provide private health care. We want to head that off. We think there's a way of doing that, and we're prepared to work.

This motion is really our means of trying to assist the minister of intergovernmental affairs to head off the spectre of unbridled for-profiters. We hope the minister is going to appreciate that we're putting out the olive branch. This is an attempt . . .

DR. WEST: The problem today is the inefficiency of the present system.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I thought the trade-off was that if I said something nice about the Minister of Energy, he'd leave me alone to let me finish, in the shrinking amount of time trying to talk about the importance of the motion from my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, I think the chair is about at the end. If you wish to continue like this, the chair will take the next step of inviting you out. Let us hear from Calgary-Buffalo and anyone else who wants to enter into debate, but this talking back and forth and drowning out the speaker is unparliamentary and unworthy of both sides.

Calgary-Buffalo.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and I'll speak louder too.

Because Canada delivers services through a mixture, we don't have a unique public system. We have a blended system. We have private providers. We have public providers. We have not-for-profit providers. We're in a particular position where we know that has to be addressed. Apparently it is not yet. There have been no adequate safeguards, no adequate provision put into the MAI to be able to address those things, and that's really all we're asking for. That's all my colleague the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark is asking members to do today. This is only a motion. This is probably the most innocuous way of trying to help the minister of intergovernmental affairs.

What we're trying to do is strengthen his hand at the bargaining table so that when he sits down with his colleagues from across the country, the most powerful tool that minister will have is not the big briefcase he gets from his deputy minister. It's not going to be the packet of Alberta pins which he's going to share with the other ministers from across the country. It won't even be the stale sandwich he's brought with him from the Edmonton cafeteria. Mr. Speaker, what it's going to be is a motion passed by 83 out of 83 members that says that this Legislature is concerned. We want to strengthen the hand of that minister when he embarks on those kinds of intergovernmental negotiations. He's going to have the support, I hope, of 83 members who say that we're going to have to insist on those safeguards.

We see British Columbia and we see some other provinces that think it's sufficiently important to require some specific guarantees. Well, you know, I tell my friends in those other provinces that the government in Alberta is at least as smart as the government of British Columbia. I don't want to have to tell them, Mr. Speaker, that provincial legislators in British Columbia were prepared to step up to the plate and defend the interests of public and not-for-profit providers in that province and the people in Alberta weren't smart enough to do the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, those were the key points I wanted to make. I know I have colleagues that want to develop a number of very persuasive arguments, and I know members opposite are anxiously awaiting the opportunity to listen to those arguments. So those are the points I wanted to make.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SHARIFF: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have listened quite closely to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, and I appreciate his comments. The ongoing negotiations regarding the multilateral agreement on investment are important to Alberta, and they demand a high level of attention and public debate. This Assembly is certainly an excellent forum, and it is fortunate that the

Legislature is addressing this issue once again. As most of my colleagues in this House, I listen quite closely to the discussion and debate which occur here.

If I recall correctly, a few questions have been asked of the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister of Labour in regard to the MAI. The Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs also made a statement in this regard a few weeks ago. The MAI is an agreement which will facilitate international investment. At a time when we rely heavily on domestic and foreign investment in our economy, it is beneficial for us to facilitate a simpler investment process. The MAI will ensure that all signatory countries make their laws and regulations pertaining to investment clear and transparent to the international community and that investors are given national treatment, meaning that they are treated no less favourably than domestic investors.

This in no way means that Alberta's ability to govern and make policy decisions according to our provincial standards and expectations will be violated. Our hands will not be tied. We will simply be ensuring that foreign investors are subject to the same laws and regulations as domestic investors. Alberta has always been open to new investment, and if we can provide a better environment for foreign investment without compromising our ability to govern according to the needs of Albertans, then such a change should be welcomed.

The MAI addresses the framework which allows investors the freedom to invest internationally. As it stands, there is a high degree of uncertainty for investors, including Canadians with interests abroad. The rules of practice and investment are quite unclear and change frequently in some countries. It is often very difficult to determine what domestic law and administration require of foreign investments. The MAI will clarify this. It will provide investors the same opportunity to compete based on a common international framework but not on reduced domestic standards.

The negotiations, which are ongoing at this point, have recently been extended through 1998 to 1999, giving the OECD member countries more time to address their specific concerns. Member countries have the opportunity to make appropriate reservations or exemptions according to domestic conditions. This is the process in which the federal and provincial governments are currently involved in negotiations.

Since the MAI is an international agreement, it is the federal government which is the primary negotiator and will be the primary signatory. What is of concern for Alberta and all provinces is the clear separation of powers between the federal and provincial governments provided for in the Canadian Constitution. Since it is not only areas within federal jurisdiction which may be affected by this agreement, it is important for the Alberta government to be involved in negotiations to protect provincial areas of control. I understand this has been Alberta's position since negotiations first began in 1995. From comments made by the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs on March 2 in this House, it seems that the relationship between the provinces and the federal government is of primary importance. The minister commented that there should be no presumption that the provinces would be automatically covered by an agreement and that there should be full respect for health, social services, education, environment, labour, natural resources, and foreign ownership, all of which are within the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

3:50

The motion we have before us today does not seem to reflect the issues of jurisdictions within Canada. This motion suggests that the federal government should be given the freedom to make reservations and exemptions which are based on areas which are outside of their jurisdiction and within the jurisdiction of the provinces. I cannot support such a proposal. It is this government who should be given the opportunity to ensure that provisions within the MAI fully respect areas within our jurisdiction, including health care, education, social services, environment, and labour.

This being the case, I move to amend Motion 508 to better represent the nature of the negotiations and the jurisdictional concerns I have addressed. The amended motion would read as follows:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to approve the multilateral agreement on investment, MAI, only if it is in the public interest of Albertans and urge the federal government to ensure that the MAI fully respects the jurisdiction of the province of Alberta, including the areas of health care, education, social services, labour, environment, and Crown property.

This amendment would better reflect the nature of the negotiations between the federal and provincial governments and would not give the federal government the opportunity to interfere in areas which are clearly within provincial jurisdiction.

An important issue for the provinces is that a signatory country may choose to make some areas of their domestic interest exempt from MAI. It is their right and their duty if necessary. Since Alberta has clear jurisdiction in the areas of education, health, social services, environment, labour, and natural resources, I believe it should be Alberta's position that we should have the final approval on what, if any, effect the MAI will have on these areas. It should not be up to the federal government to make these determinations. I support the comments made by the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs that there should be no presumption that once the federal government becomes a signatory, the provinces will do the same. The provinces' explicit consent should be required.

Having moved this amendment, I would also like to make it clear that I believe the high standards of social services, health care, education, labour, and environment we have in Alberta will continue to be fundamental to the province. The Minister of Labour and the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs have confirmed their commitment to these principles. This amendment would provide the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs with a clear mandate and direction from this Assembly to proceed in negotiations which would have the best interests of Albertans in mind. It would make a clear statement to the federal government that Alberta intends to protect the areas within its jurisdiction from interference and will negotiate in that regard.

With that, I would like to conclude my remarks and hope I can trust each of you to support this amendment. Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak against the amendment, if I may, for a few minutes. It seems to me that the impact of the amendment is to dilute and to weaken the motion from the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. By deleting the parts of the motion that specify that the province will

guard and make sure that the agreement is consistent with the principles of quality, accessible, publicly funded Canadian health care, et cetera – I think laying out those standards is not only a message to the federal government, but it's a message to the provincial government that during negotiations the quality of those services is important and that any actions the provincial government takes have to be grounded in the belief that the kinds of standards and the kind of quality that we have in place have to be maintained both in any kind of negotiations and certainly here within the province. The amendment weakens the motion, and I think, were the mover here, she would find some difficulty. So I would urge members to vote against it.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, followed by the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to contribute to the debate on Motion 508 and on the amendment. The debate on this motion obviously indicates a recognition of the link between international trade and investment negotiations and our local economy here in Alberta. Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs monitors these major international economic negotiations and co-ordinates Alberta's input into the appropriate federal negotiating team or ministry. We're currently working with the federal government to formalize the relationship between the provinces and territories and the federal government on trade and investment negotiations to ensure that provincial and territorial interests are clearly heard and reflected in the Canadian positions. Pending the formalization of this relationship with the federal government, we will continue to monitor significant international negotiations and to strongly promote provincial views to the federal government, particularly when the international negotiations affect matters within provincial jurisdiction.

As I mentioned in my statement on March 2, 1998, Alberta has been closely involved with the federal government since the negotiations began, and we've identified the following issues as key areas for Alberta. Canadian provinces should not be presumed to be automatically covered by the agreement. They should have the opportunity to consider the agreement and explicitly consent to being covered by the rights and obligations of MAI. There must be full respect for areas of provincial jurisdiction, including health and social services, education, environment, labour, natural resources, and foreign ownership of land. The MAI should include a reservation process similar to NAFTA which would operate to exclude specific provincial measures and preserve current and future policy flexibility for Canadian governments in important sectors such as health, social services, and public education.

At the February 19, 1998, meeting of federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for international trade the federal government told us that they had clearly indicated to the countries involved in the OECD negotiations that coverage of provinces should not be assumed. The federal government has also already tabled specific and general reservations related to federal measures which could be applied to provincial measures if it were decided that the MAI will apply to the provinces. This includes a sectoral reservation for health and social services. However, it is clear that the MAI is a work in progress, and we cannot predict with certainty which issues may arise that could have implications for provincial jurisdiction. Alberta does not

negotiate directly in OECD. Rather, we contribute to the development of a Canadian position with our provincial, territorial, and federal counterparts.

The communiqué from the February 19 meeting of federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for international trade noted that the MAI negotiations will not conclude in April 1998 and will continue for some time. This will provide us with an additional period of time for Albertans to provide their views on MAI, and we are currently examining the most appropriate method to receive those views.

The motion as amended recognizes that the areas mentioned in the original motion are already dealt with by exceptions in the MAI or are simply not covered by the agreement. With respect to the MAI's consistency with principles mentioned in the motion, we would suggest that the items identified are not primary issues in the negotiations: "quality, accessible, publicly funded . . . health care, education, and social services," for example. Nothing in the MAI prevents a country from providing public services. Federal negotiators have already tabled their reservation for the social services sector which covers the areas described. Other countries in the negotiations have indicated that this area is not of commercial interest to them.

4:00

"Preservation of high-quality labour and environmental standards." Nothing in the MAI prevents a country from establishing measures of general application so long as these measures treat foreign investors or investments no less favourably than domestic investors or investments. There is a concern that ordinary regulatory activities may be construed to constitute takings which might require compensation to investors under the provisions of an investment agreement, and there is general agreement in these negotiations that we want to avoid that result in the MAI.

"Promotion of the development and growth of small and medium-sized . . . businesses." A completed MAI may help small and medium-sized businesses in their expansion efforts by providing a stable and consistent set of investment rules. Companies would not have to rely on economic strength or size in order to achieve a fair and level playing field with other countries.

It's our hope that the Legislature will give the government a strong endorsement to put forward provincial positions regarding matters within provincial jurisdiction, whatever they may be and whenever they may arise in the negotiations, without being limited to the areas that are described in the original Motion 508. The amended Motion 508 also specifically recognizes existing Alberta legislation which provides for the approval of international trade and investment agreements if they are found to be in the public interest of Albertans. So, Mr. Speaker, I support the amendments to Motion 508 and urge my fellow members to support them as well.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm not persuaded. I've listened to the intergovernmental affairs minister, and really what we've got with these amendments is this, and I say this with due respect to the sponsor, the Member for Calgary-McCall. What we've done here is we've taken out, really, the essence of the motion. The thing would have us take out words like "preservation of high-quality." It would take out specific words that are what make the original motion work. If you look at the amended motion, what it talks about is that we want the federal government to respect the jurisdiction of the province of Alberta.

Well, I thank the sponsor of the amendment for this reason. What it helps to do now is really crystallize the issue and define it in a much starker sense than perhaps existed before in the debate. The real issue comes down to, minister of intergovernmental affairs, that all of us in this Assembly aren't confident that ministers of the Crown and the cabinet in this province are working as hard as they can and should to promote public health care and a strong public education system. We see it in the underfunding. We see it in the lack of resources. We see it in the – I was going to say indiscriminate – if not indiscriminate at least the considered support for more tax dollars going into private education. We see it in sheltering private schools and private colleges from freedom of information legislation. We see it in sheltering private schools and private colleges from protecting and respecting the privacy rights of students and staff.

Mr. Speaker, there is a litany of examples that one could cite that show ways in which this province has simply not accepted the responsibility that some of us think the government has in terms of promoting those kinds of public services. I'm not talking about the speeches we hear in the Assembly about support for the Canada Health Act. I'm talking about when we open up the budget and where dollars are deficient and where dollars are going. That's what really signals what this government's belief system is all about.

I always appreciate somebody coming forward with an amendment rather than simply voting against a motion. So I thank the Member for Calgary-McCall for that, for doing it in this kind of a straightforward fashion, but I still have that concern that really the net effect of the amendment is just for the provincial government to say: trust us. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, I hope you don't hold me accountable for the support I'm getting from my caucus colleagues, and I want to disassociate myself right now from some of the animated spirit I see in my colleagues. Look; they can hardly restrain themselves because they're anxious to get into the debate.

I want to take my seat, Mr. Speaker, but I just wanted to attempt to make the point that I think this amendment substantially, dramatically weakens what was a very powerful motion from my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark. I think what it does is it, frankly, lets the government off the hook. Here I was trying to help the minister of intergovernmental affairs by giving him a stronger mandate to go into those discussions with his colleagues from across Canada, and he wants to dilute it.

Maybe this minister in his past experience has had a different experience negotiating, and there's more than one style for successful negotiation. But I think there are few that are more powerful than going in saying: "My mandate has been narrowed by the people in the Legislature I have to report to. I've been given clear, explicit direction to fight for the preservation of high-quality services," not just adequate services, which is where the amendment would take us, but the preservation of high-quality services. And is there a constituent anywhere in this province that would want their MLA to settle for less than preservation of high-quality standards? So that's what we're trying to do. I'm confused now. We were trying to support the minister. We were trying to give him the strongest possible bargaining position, and he's trying to dilute that strong bargaining position.

Mr. Speaker, we see time and time again this government go into negotiations and come out with less than what we think they ought to. We simply want to assist. The amendment does not provide the measure of assistance that the minister needs. In this case he may not even recognize the assistance that we think he

requires. We're going to have to insist on providing that minister with a stronger hand. He may think that when he sits down with his colleagues from around the country, he's persuasive enough that he doesn't need this strengthening of his position, but it's a great safety measure. It should be a great comfort to him, and most importantly, it'll be a great comfort to all Albertans.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

4:10

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address this motion today in terms of the consideration of the amended portion and the MAI as they pertain to the social services we have come to demand and expect in Alberta. I know how important the services which are provided by the government are to Albertans and indeed to all Canadians. Our health care, education, and family income support are held in high esteem, and we demand much from them. It is often said that this is what sets Canada apart from other industrialized nations and quite rightly so. Since 1867 we have become a nation which expects a certain environment for our citizens, and since we have had the ability to maintain such high standards, we have done so.

Canada is a federation of 10 provinces and two territories who share responsibilities. There is a clear division of power and responsibility between governments. Most social services are provided through provincial governments, including support services to children and families, education, and health care. Within the federal guidelines the provinces are experts on what works and what doesn't work within their provinces, and because of this, the provinces have had the opportunity to develop unique ways of providing the services.

What works in terms of education in Newfoundland may not be transferable in its entirety to Alberta. Demands made by demographic population will certainly affect program focus. Seniors' programs required in Alberta, because of our large population of seniors, may not be necessary in Manitoba, for example. As well, beyond the merits of individual programs the delivery of these programs cannot be expected to be the same. It can be expected that within federal guidelines priorities will be different. Consideration must be made to very different provincial social, economic, and political environments when planning and developing programs and policies. The development of these priorities will be dictated by the electorate through a democratic electoral process.

The federal Minister for International Trade has publicly outlined the exemptions the federal government has put forward regarding the MAI. They include health care, social programs, education, culture, and programs for aboriginal people and minority groups. He has also acknowledged that these reservations or exemptions are required at both the federal and provincial levels. I think this is fair for him to say since some of the areas affected by the reservations, such as health care and education, fall within the purview of the provinces.

The question which I think needs to be addressed is whether it is the role of the federal government to provide reservations in areas so predominantly within provincial jurisdictions. Can we be sure they will adequately address Alberta's concern among those of other provinces? I don't believe we can expect the federal government to address our concerns as comprehensively as we or the other provinces are able to. As an example, we are acutely aware of the intricacies of delivering education to Alberta students. We understand that government needs to be involved in developing standards in terms of curriculum, teaching standards, facilities, availability of programs, and funding.

It is an appropriate time for this Legislature to be discussing the conditions of the MAI. The Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs has made us aware that the deadline for the conclusion of the negotiations has been extended beyond 1998 into 1999. We should look at this extension as an opportunity to develop a framework which is extensive enough to encompass our needs as a province.

It seems clear that since negotiations began in 1995, OECD member nations have found the concept of an international investment agreement to be important enough to warrant very sincere and honest discussion of their participation. I commend the participating nations for this. The ramifications of such an agreement will be long lasting and change the way international investment is viewed and undertaken in the future. The negotiation process the federal government is now involved in allows for country-specific reservations to be made. This is similar to NAFTA and is necessary in any international trade agreement. In any nation there will always be sectors of the economy, government, and social services which the nation will choose to remain entirely sovereign over. Once declared, these areas are not subject to negotiation and cannot be amended or changed by any other nations or organizations.

We need to provide a strong message of support for the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs when he negotiates with his federal counterparts. We must ensure that areas within our jurisdiction remain within our control as they relate to the MAI. It is the provinces which will be left to deal with the consequences of these exemptions directly, and it is the provinces who should be able to determine the extent and the parameters of these reservations.

Mr. Speaker, international investment is important to the Canadian economy and vital to Alberta's economic strength. In Canada trade accounts for over 40 percent of the gross domestic product. To put this in human terms, every \$5 billion in foreign investment provides 40,000 Canadian jobs over five years. Over \$180 billion in foreign investment is working in Canada, and Canadians themselves have invested over \$170 billion outside the country. These are important numbers. They are important because it seems far too easy for someone to characterize large foreign investors as noncontributors to the Canadian economy and thereby noncontributors to the maintenance of our social safety net. It may not be so easy for those same people to tell the Canadians and Albertans who have benefited substantially from foreign investment, who have good jobs, positive prospects for the future, that these dollars don't contribute. It will be much harder to tell Revenue Canada that there is no benefit to having more Canadians working and companies growing. We have always been open to foreign investment in this province and look forward to increased opportunities for Albertans to invest more extensively on an international level.

Mr. Speaker, we can sometimes be lost in the discussion of the MAI. Will it provide better access to foreign markets for Albertans? Yes, we will see a benefit from increased foreign investment, but we will also see increased growth and expansion of Canadian and Albertan companies. They will be able to access other markets under a more transparent investment framework. Every businessperson knows that market access is integral to success, and procedural roadblocks to access have a direct effect on their ability to compete.

Mr. Speaker, it must also be noted that one of the principles of the Alberta advantage and one of the reasons investment, both domestic and foreign, is so readily available in Alberta is our

well-developed infrastructure. This includes everything from the excellent K to 12 education, well-respected and extensive post-education facilities, health care, social services, highways, and the quality of life our environment provides. Alberta has a well-educated and healthy workforce. This is our most important resource, and it relies on well-established and effectively delivered services, which the province has maintained.

Alberta will not compromise the ability of Albertans to reach this level of personal success. It is good for Alberta to allow individuals these opportunities and to maintain a positive environment for them to succeed within. It is only in view of the interests of Albertans that the final agreement should be accepted. This a simple precept of the motion, but it necessitates that our government, the Alberta government, be given final approval of the MAI for the protection of Albertans. We cannot expect that the federal government will ensure that the specific interests of Albertans will be covered by the final MAI they negotiate. In terms of the areas within our jurisdiction, we must be given the freedom to accept or decline the MAI solely on the interests of Albertans. That is our responsibility.

I support this amended motion. I support this government in knowing how best to deal with the concerns of Albertans. I ask each of you to support this motion today.

Thank you.

4:20

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I probably won't be as eloquent as Calgary-Fort. You'd swear he'd almost prepared notes to speak to this surprise amendment.

MR. SAPERS: The one that's dated March 17 and then crossed out on March 24? That one?

MRS. SOETAERT: The one that's dated March 17, yes.

However, I want to speak a little bit about the irony of this afternoon in regards to the amendment. Earlier today we had people opposite saying: let's not go with this bill because the feds are going to handle it. Ultimate faith in the feds. And here we were saying: be prepared; be a leader; give them some advice. But, no, ultimate faith in the feds with regard to Bill 210. Suddenly we get to Motion 508, and here we're saying: here's a little card in your pocket; here's an ace up your sleeve; here's something you can use from the humble opposition who offers such good advice. Within that advice we said: let's make sure that the minister on his little journey to Ottawa can fight for quality, accessible, publicly funded health care, education, and social services. Those are things that are important. Those are things that are important to people in Alberta. We all know that in here. No matter how you duck and dive around it, no matter how you try to fund some private operations, every one of us knows that in the heart of every Albertan they want publicly funded accessible, quality health care, they want publicly funded quality, accessible education, and they want a strong social safety net that's there when you need it.

Here we have put that in the motion so the minister could wave that Alberta flag down in Ottawa. Well, there's a bit of a flag flap down there. He might not take a flag. He may just take pins.

MR. DICKSON: And a stale sandwich.

MRS. SOETAERT: And a stale sandwich. The pins, the stale sandwich, and an Alberta cap.

MR. MITCHELL: Which car would he drive down there?

MRS. SOETAERT: I don't think he'd drive his own car there. I think he'd take a plane. [interjection] Well, we don't all get trips to Hong Kong either.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the amendment.

MRS. SOETAERT: However, back to the motion at hand and the amendment to it. The intent of this motion is being totally undercut by the Member for Calgary-McCall. The total intent of it is gone, because one of the strongest lines in the motion is "quality, accessible, publicly funded . . . health care." He could have grabbed that. He could have waved that motion and said: this is what 83 people sent me with; this is what we want for Alberta; this is what we want to make sure is taken care of. Instead what's neatly cut out of that are those exact words, and that's very disappointing to me. For that reason I cannot support this amendment.

What this now reads is that "only if it is in the public interest of Albertans." Well, that's putting a lot of pressure on the minister of intergovernmental affairs. He has broad shoulders, he says, and he does. However, along with the broad shoulders you need another arrow in your quiver, and what it would have been was our motion. What it is not is this amendment. So I'm very disappointed that it was neatly avoided, that this was changed so substantially that it does not read as the same motion. If we had time to look it up in *Beauchesne*, we would find out that it's almost out of order.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to again express my disappointment and mention that the intent of this motion has been completely undermined, and I'm very disappointed to see it in front of us. I wish we could have given the hon. minister a good package, a good solid motion that he could have gone with. I think we have the opportunity with these negotiations – I'm glad they've been extended – to really be strong advocates of public health, public education.

What this has virtually done – in fact it's almost sneaky in that it says: we're not going to be advocates of that. Because it was taken out, you have to wonder what the intent is. Has it been deliberately taken out? Well, I'm afraid it has been, and that disappoints me because we should be fighting. Everyone here knows that Albertans want publicly funded health care. Here was an opportunity to go fight for it, and I'm very disappointed to see that it's not going to be there.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this amendment. I'm very disappointed that the government did not find its way clear to support this amendment and take it and run with it. So with those few words I will express my concern. Hopefully, this amendment will fail and the original motion will pass.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora in the minute that may remain.

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. Mr. Speaker, I guess time may adjourn before I'm finished, but I'll start my remarks in any case. I certainly can't support the amendment. I note that the amendment has been signed by Parliamentary Counsel, but the original motion talked about working with the federal government, emphasis on

that phrase "work with," talked about "publicly funded Canadian health care, education, and social services," the operative part being "publicly funded."

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sorry that I have to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[Motion as amended carried]

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

Bill 31
Appropriation Act, 1998

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, perhaps we could have someone move third reading and then we could get on with the debate.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, I will do that. I move third reading of Bill 31, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm glad that somebody was able to move it because I know that a number of my colleagues certainly want to speak to Bill 31 at third reading.

Mr. Speaker, what I simply wanted to highlight were the shortcomings and the difficulty with Bill 31, the Appropriation Act, 1998, and to touch on very briefly the seven weaknesses that I see with the appropriation bill that's in front of us. There are a couple of specific items, but since we're in third reading, I simply want to address the fact that what we have in front of us is the government not doing the kind of long-term, intensive planning that we think Albertans deserve and that we think Albertans want to see.

Mr. Speaker, a number of specific things. The fact that Bill 31 does not reflect a program-based performance budget – I went through that at the committee stage and offered, I think, some more specific comments in terms of why I think it's deficient in that respect and why my caucus thinks it's deficient. The fact that the three-year budget plans upon which Bill 31 is premised have not been prepared on the basis of program category but on the basis of ministerial boundaries continues to be a problem.

One need look no further than pages 3, 4, and 5 to understand that those silos that we heard so much of at the Growth Summit – we were going to get people thinking outside silos. But the government of Alberta is the one agency that didn't seem to get the message from those people involved in organizing the Growth Summit, because when it comes time to deal with a budget, we're not dealing with child poverty as an item and we're not dealing with population health as an item. What we do is we look at Bill 31, pages 3, 4, and 5, and we see simply a reflection of the existing departmental responsibilities. That continues to be a major weakness. So Bill 31 doesn't reflect a program-based performance budget, which is a shortcoming.

4:30

Number two, annual performance reports, which ought to inform any debate on the Appropriation Act, in fact don't exist in a meaningful way because the focus is on inputs by this government and not outputs.

The third shortcoming is auditing of annual performance reports by the Auditor General. If we had them, that would be a facility

that doesn't exist now. That limits the effectiveness of Bill 31.

Fourthly, an economic and fiscal strategy report is a significant omission, a serious omission.

The fifth item is that Bill 31 does not reflect a fiscal stabilization fund, something which I know the Treasury critic and my caucus colleagues have argued in the past is important and essential. In a province that's as resource based with such a cyclical-natured economy, a fiscal stabilization fund is essential. Bill 31 doesn't reflect that.

Monthly budget updates: something we've asked for because the quarterly budget updates simply aren't frequent enough to be able to react to swings in elements of our cyclical economy.

Finally, independent projections of revenues.

So those problems continue to be a difficulty. The other items I think have been covered in some detail both at second reading and at the committee stage, and I wouldn't propose to belabour them now, Mr. Speaker. Those are the comments I wanted to make with respect to the Appropriation Act, 1998.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments at third reading on Bill 31, the Appropriation Act, 1998. I think that when it comes to this stage of the bill, we should reflect upon the huge amounts of money that we are actually dealing with. The \$12.363 billion and the breakdown that we have in the budget is a huge budget and one that has been scrutinized probably not as thoroughly as most of us would have liked to the last number of days. Nevertheless, it has been scrutinized. A number of questions, a number of issues seem to be, I think, reflected in the comments of all members as they've considered it.

I think one of the disappointments of the budget has been the failure of the budget to adequately reflect what most Albertans heard and what was reported out of the Growth Summit. I think people heard the reports from that Growth Summit. Those of us that were there as observers left with a clear understanding that people and people concerns were to be the priorities of the government. Certainly the expectation of everyone at those meetings was that people and people concerns would be highlighted in the budget, and those concerns were focused on three areas: education – I think education came out as a huge priority – health care, and social services. In many ways this budget has failed to match those priorities with financial plans that can be carried out in the next year so that the things that were said at the Growth Summit and the plans that were made there become realities for Albertans.

In terms of education, I think the fact that the government still seems to dismiss a number of things that not just Albertans but Canadians and North Americans take to be important is a shame. I think that schools and school boards are still struggling with class sizes that they find inordinately large, class sizes where they find it difficult to work with individual students, and class sizes where the kinds of resources that are needed to deal with those large numbers of youngsters are just not available. I think the pressures on the schools as a result of this budget have not been lessened.

If you look at the kind of labour unrest in this city now in terms of the public schools, the quandary that the board finds itself in with teachers not being satisfied with the kind of proposals before

them, and if you look for the root of those problems, it has to be in the kind of funding that that board and many other boards across the province have available to them. The fact that those teachers and those boards co-operated with the government so willingly in terms of the 5 percent cutback and to find a few years down the road that government ministers claim the cutbacks were negotiated and that any return of the 5 percent the boards are on the hook for negotiating themselves and finding the dollars – I find that just almost incomprehensible, that that kind of a scam should have been carried out on boards and on teachers in the province.

I think it's abundantly clear and will become clearer as disputes across the province are not settled that the government has an ethical obligation to sit down and treat all employees fairly and to redress to school boards the moneys they need, to return that 5 percent to teaching and support staff. So the budget, I think, has failed in education in a number of ways in terms of providing the kind of classroom environment that we hope for children, in providing the kinds of resources that boards need to deal fairly with their staff and teachers in particular.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The second area, of course, is health care, and you don't have to be in this city long to see how badly the public health care system has been ravaged and the kind of problem that the government now has. It's going to be a long, long time, regardless of how much money is put back into the health care system, before Albertans and before people in this city believe that the health care system is capable of serving them when the need arises, and that problem of perception I think is going to be a difficult one to overcome. The kind of lurching, patching program to patching program, that is going on I don't think is the way that public confidence in the system is going to be restored. I think the government is right: when people go to hospitals and actually experience the system, they're often very supportive of the care that they receive. I think that's more a tribute to the kind of people that are in the system and trying to work with patients than it is to the health of the system itself.

So I think that in those two areas, Mr. Speaker, the budget is a disappointment, and I think that a good number of Albertans who had looked to the Growth Summit for setting of priorities for re-establishing some sort of balance within the province in terms of programs and access to programs are going to be as disappointed as I am. With those comments I'd conclude my remarks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, rise to speak against Bill 31, the Appropriation Act, 1998, not for all that it contains, because there are some areas of expenditures by this government that in fact are right and proper and reasonable expectations for the moneys that are expended. The difficulty is a lot of the expenditures that are not contained, and the reason for them is a bit beyond me when we live in a province that is second to none in income, in a Canadian context, that is actually second to none anywhere in the world in how we're able to manage our affairs in a manner that is democratically responsible, I believe.

Here we are with all of these positives, yet I go not 10, 12 blocks from here and find children in dire need of a hot lunch program, because they simply aren't fed well. I go across to the

university and find young adults that are students that are surviving this time of year on peanut butter sandwiches and care packages from some of their friends. Is that any way to reasonably live in a society such as ours? I just don't understand it. I mean, what are we saving for? To keep some fat old guy in lots of cash? I don't think so.

MRS. SOETAERT: The luxury cars.

MR. WHITE: Yeah, to keep people in their luxury automobiles, so we can buy a new Lexus every second year whether we need it or not. I mean, that's not my idea of a society that cares and is looking for some long-term longevity here, where we have it sustained by intellectual property and sustained by a joy of living and being able to give to others and truly be a society that we can say has some credit.

I see an education system from K to 12 that is in dire need of some assistance. I see children that are simply not getting it. They're just not getting the care and attention. Yes, you could say that perhaps it should be the parents' responsibility, and in large measure it should be. But it's not happening. So it's pay me now or pay me later, and with this budget it's definitely pay me later. My children and the children of those that are here are going to have to pay. It's patently obvious to all concerned where the young adults have gone astray. They've gone astray back in kindergarten: didn't learn how to read properly, felt that they weren't as good as they might be at things. Where's the crime of today and tomorrow from? It comes from way back there. This budget does absolutely nothing, as other budgets have also – but we've passed that. That's water under the bridge. As the Premier says, this is now and that was then.

The objects of this appropriation bill. I think my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo mentioned it too, that we went through a whole major exercise on the Growth Summit, bringing together a lot of very knowledgeable people. I was quite thrilled at being able to be at that conference and listen to the input of these people, the heartfelt input. What was the long-term goal of all of these people? These were handpicked people from all corners of the province, from all walks of life, all being successful in their chosen field, however small or large it may have been. What conclusion did they come up with? Tear down these silos of self-interest and look at the very, very broad picture and say: where do we want to go, and how do we want to get there?

Where was the emphasis? On education, on some infrastructure. It wasn't on paying down the debt and making ourselves look good and saving up for the day when we'll all be able to finance any number of ventures. No. It was: pay now.

Thank goodness the oil price is up again today. If we sustain through an entire year at \$16 a barrel, we are so far and away ahead per capita of anybody in Ontario or in eastern Canada. We're so vastly far ahead of them, and we squander this opportunity. We've totally squandered it. I could afford the same taxes as somebody in Ontario. I'd rather not pay it of course, but I could afford it. If I can get those services for those people around me in the communities that I represent, not for my own children – they're well taken care of – and not for my next-door neighbours. They're well taken care of too. But three doors down it's not the case. They're having difficulty. They've lost a couple of jobs in the last couple of years, and they aren't what they used to be. The education system and the health care system have failed them miserably, to the extent that there has to be a stay-at-home mom now. They're just having those difficulties.

Now, that's not the kind of society that I want to say that I can be proud of. This side of this grand hall and the other side of the grand hall are not that far apart, but this is a fundamental document of this government. What happens eight, 10 years down the road when you say: geez, you guys were kind of right over there; we'd never admit it then? But it's no good saying that to me. Who are the thousands and thousands and thousands of children, in this case, that are not being educated as they should? How do you say sorry to them? You can't. There is, as law would call it, no matter of restitution. There's no remedy; there's nothing. Once you've passed the third grade and you've had the humiliation of having to stand up in the class to try to read from your reader and you can't do it, the child gets all flustered and frustrated and feels so inadequate and their self-esteem falls so very far that they begin to fight. They're going to fight back.

MR. MAR: Why are you running down the public education system?

MR. WHITE: I've had an interjection here from the minister. Mr. Minister, if I was speaking of 90 percent of the class, you'd be absolutely right. Ninety percent of the class does soar. It's that 10 percent that absolutely does not, and I have been there. I don't know where you have been. You certainly don't have enough miles on your clock to be able to understand it. I happen to have been there. You happened to be somewhere else. I wasn't there; I was in the front line. You happened to file in and fall in the right place at the right time. Lucky you. When you were going to school and getting an education, there happened to be others that were watching from close at hand and saying: lookit; this is not occurring. I happen to have represented a lot of people in eastern Edmonton that you never saw and that I don't think you ever will see.

Actually, I'd really like to extend an invitation to come out to at least three schools in my constituency, one that you know very well, and listen to the kids. Just listen to their language as they try to speak to you. I mean, you have to feel sorry for these children because you know darn well they're not getting enough in the classroom to even present themselves to a banker or to a prospective employer, to anything, now or even later. How can you explain that when they get to grade 11 or grade 12 and they go out in the marketplace, they cannot even get the words out to say: I need a job? When they do, it's double negatives; it's all manner of things that are just not acceptable.

4:50

In a land that can provide this, we should be absolutely the very best, unequivocally the very best. For those children that are having difficulty, we should be able to afford to have some interest in them and to say: yes, we can bring you along, child, and we can bring you to the highest level of your attainment. It's not necessary to rank ourselves against anyone. We can rank ourselves here against ourselves. We don't have to rank ourselves elsewhere, because every time we do, we fail miserably. I know that kids will say: look how well we do internationally in this exam and this exam. Well, yeah, that may be an accumulation of X number of years, because a child didn't get to that examination by the last three months of work or the last two weeks or the last 10 minutes. It was the accumulation of the last 15 years from an early education, and that covers a very, very small minority of the children that you're teaching.

I'm not talking about the 90 percent; I went through that before, Mr. Minister. It's that small minority. One of the few times in

history we have the opportunity to help those children. You know what can be done, if it can be done early enough. I've heard this minister say in this very room that early childhood intervention actually works, and we have seen it work. I've heard him say that as I've heard others speak of it. Yet why can't it happen for every single child? Is that not a good objective? Is that not something to say, that I can leave this place, whenever it is, three or five weeks or next week, and say, yes, that's what we tried to do? Maybe we didn't attain all of it, but I'll tell you that we certainly sought out those children and tried to bring them along. That's just but one area, the area of education.

MR. MAR: Why do you choose to ignore those programs of early intervention?

MR. WHITE: I've had an interjection here: why do I choose to ignore those programs? Yes, there's some programs that are there, and yes, I'm sure there's a great number of children that are helped, but there's not enough, absolutely not enough. You don't have to go very far from where we stand right here to find that it is not occurring. I can't say that it occurs any better in Vancouver or Regina or Podunk, Saskatchewan. It may not. But, quite frankly, they don't live over a piece of turf that God gave a great deal of natural wealth to under the ground that bubbles to the surface and where we the adults of this world take it on ourselves to say how wonderful we are. Why not take that and actually expend it in an area where you absolutely, unequivocally know that it can do some good? Quite frankly, I can't answer that when other people ask me that.

I speak to those people on the other side a great deal, and I think they're generally an intelligent lot and are generally people that do care about it. But somehow, when you add it all together, they get this macho image of: I'm so great and I'm so wonderful and I can handle it, and they come out not caring, concerning themselves more about what we drive home in and how we get back to our constituency than about what the responsibility is here. I don't hear a lot of debate. I'd love to have that debate. I would love to have the minister absolutely prove me absolutely wrong in all that I've said, but it won't occur. It certainly won't occur in this jurisdiction. I'd like to challenge some members to rally to the cry in defence of the minister's budget or lack thereof. I'm sure he's a champion of the cause in his caucus when it comes to disseminating the funds, but it still is not enough.

It may be that it can be expended in a different manner. Maybe you can organize things, but quite frankly, I cannot see it. I've been through it and challenged the two local boards here on their expenditure and administration, and by and large they have been able to justify those expenditures. So it gets down to the classroom. There is no other way to expend an operating budget. A capital budget is another thing. They say: "Look; here we are. I have 27 students in this class, and there's three that I just cannot possibly get to. I don't have enough time to be enough of a teacher and a parent, and I'm losing them. I know I'm losing them, and I'm going to have to move them on." Now, that's a pretty sad indictment. I don't know what can be done about it other than expending the funds to get the job done, and quite frankly, I'm not very pleased with it.

There are some other areas, too, that I should move on to. Time is moving on here, and I hate to take all the time available to me in this last kick at the cat, as it were, in these estimates. There is the other legacy that it's leaving, and it's fortuitous that the minister of environment is here. I quite enjoy his company

sometimes, not always but sometimes. In this case there is another error that will have to be explained later. I dealt with this in an earlier discussion on the same matter: the error of allowing these old gasoline distribution sites, the old service station sites, to languish and to in fact over time spread the contaminants about on that site. But we've dealt with that.

The area that I'd like to concern myself more with here this afternoon is the area of solid waste and how we've gone from virtually not dealing with it at all, in my early career as an engineer in the early '70s, to this pinnacle from about 1983 to '86-87 and then dropping off now. But it has dropped off now into sometimes caring a great deal about it and dealing with it in a manner that it should be dealt with and other times simply ignoring the truth, ignoring the facts, and I'm talking about a number of areas. It's darn difficult to tell a municipality that you absolutely must do something about a site or another site and forcing the situation. The ministry actually has done a number of those forcings, but with NIMBY taking over in most cases, it's difficult to move a site that absolutely is a terrible site away from the way the municipality has set upon it.

There's one particular case – and the minister is aware of this – and this is the Pine Lake site. This is a site that was chosen long, long ago, and yes, there are probably those that were against the site originally and still are – I suspect, but I don't know – probably because of NIMBY. They probably didn't want it close at hand, which is a reasonable goal. It's not an environmental goal, of course. The department has to listen to that. Here's an area, the substrate, that is simply not the place to put this. The department continues to allow the municipality, or in this case three municipalities, to continue to say that that is where the site is going to be. It's proven not once, not twice, but three different times to be wrong, and the minister knows that.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MR. LUND: I was wondering if under *Beauchesne* 482, sixth edition, the hon. member would entertain a question.

MR. WHITE: Why not? Yes, I'd entertain a question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder says that he is prepared to entertain a question. Please proceed.

Debate Continued

MR. LUND: The hon. member has been going on about the Pine Lake landfill, and I believe the hon. member is an engineer. I'm wondering, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member is challenging his colleagues in the profession that in fact have approved and said that the landfill is a suitable site and all of the engineering studies that have shown that very issue. I'm wondering: is he challenging the engineers that have in fact written that it is an acceptable site?

5:00

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, of course in the tradition of this House when one asks a question, it's hardly likely

that one is likely to get an answer. I mean, we've been through this many times. I shall do the best I can to attempt an answer here.

All engineering is at best a series of approximations. Taking it down to the finite element, a finite analysis, whether it be structures, the strength of a wood – put a two-by-four up and put weights on it: when is it going to fail? I mean, in theory you can tell what it is, but you can't tell when it's going to fail. So it's a matter of opinion as to when it will fail, although the margin of error gets kind of small when you're dealing with structures. When you're dealing with monolithic structures, man-made structures, steel or something, it's even finer. But when you're dealing with nature's substrata, now you're talking about something that is very, very, very different.

Now, it is my opinion that that site is not a site that should be considered. So if you take that as a challenge, that's a challenge.

Thank you, sir.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak at third reading of Bill 31. Part of me wonders how this government actually decides on what should be spent and what shouldn't be spent. I know that in a normal household we look and say: "Okay. These are our mortgage payments. We can't pay more than this or our children can't have orthodontic work, or they may not be able to join a hockey team or 4-H or many other things that they enjoy." So we balance that out between quality of life and making reasonable payments on our mortgage. Now, what I don't see in this budget is that good balance. I see an excellent debt reduction, but what we're missing is quality of life. I would venture to say that we should look for that balance here in Alberta.

Specifically, I want to talk about a few areas that concern me, where I do think we're missing that balance. One is health care. If so many RHAs are unable to balance their books and if all of them are in that situation, that should wave a red flag to this government. They should say: "You know what? We mucked up something here." We have health authorities that can't balance their books, not because they're bad managers but because they're trying to provide a service with insufficient funds.

If you want specific examples, look what's happening in Gibbons, where the health authority is saying: we're not going to go into the seniors lodge and give medications anymore; that's not part of our deal. What are we going to do? Seniors are in those lodges, and I would say that it's a better move for us to take care of them in the lodges then the next step, which is a nursing home. [interjection] Yes. Smoky Lake. St. Paul. It's going to happen all over Lakeland. That should be a red flag. I was glad the Member for Redwater brought it up here. It's a big concern, and bringing up the question isn't enough. We need an answer.

MR. GIBBONS: You won't get my mother to vote for you.

MRS. SOETAERT: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning's mother will never vote for you if things don't change out there.

I would say that this budget doesn't address that balance, certainly for seniors.

You know, in the first years of our lives and the last years of our lives we use the health care system more than any other time in our life. So that's when you're going to be most concerned

about it. Our seniors are very concerned that it is not there when they need it. For example, if you have an attack in the middle of the night, you'd better take an advocate with you that can speak up for you as you line up in the emergency room. That hasn't been addressed by this budget, and that disappoints me.

If you're looking at long-term care beds, maybe the minister has set up a task force for that. When will that task force bring back its recommendations? After we've sent people from Villeneuve to Barrhead for long-term care instead of St. Albert, probably far too late for some people who are waiting for beds right now. That has not been addressed in this budget. That's a grave concern of mine being as my constituency has three health authorities, yet we can't access services between those three. Not a good use of planning or dollars spent.

I know that the hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services must get those same calls in his constituency office, people unable to get into the Good Sam at Stony Plain because there's a lineup for those beds. So they send them to Barrhead, far away from Stony Plain. They send them somewhere. Thankfully Spruce Grove has now opened a Good Sam. That's one good thing I'll give you credit for in this budget. However, I don't know if seniors are being taken care of when we have facilities like St. Michael's, who took a hundred bucks from each of the seniors two years ago to build a facility in Spruce Grove, and it's not built. So who took care of those seniors who lost their hundred dollars? I'm sure they felt it was a good investment being that so many officials were invited and took part in the big celebrations, and here they go with the loss of a hundred dollars each.

Another area within the budget in Education that I was disappointed not to see – we still have many old schools in our province. I would hate to put my children in a drafty bedroom where the windows didn't quite seal, cracked plaster. I think that I would balance my books so that that wouldn't happen, because then they would get sick, more money down the line. This budget didn't plan for that, didn't accommodate all those children who are in drafty classrooms. Now, some have been addressed, and that's good.

Within that I would also like to say that we should give local autonomy to the schools boards so that they can do the renovations that best suit the needs of the people they represent. That's not happening within the Education budget and business plans. You only have to look as far as Thorsby to see that it's not happening there, and that's very disappointing.

Also within the Education budget. I know that the minister always says: we give them money; it's not the amount of children in a classroom; it's not the amount of money we spend. But you know what the reality is? The smaller the number of students in a classroom, the better education they will receive. You know what Mr. Speaker? I know that you have to remain neutral in that chair, but you've been in that classroom. In fact I even met a former student of yours who now lives in Stony Plain. She said to say hello. I've forgotten her name, but I'll look it up and relay that to you. If you could, I know that you would agree, from your neutral position in the chair, that the smaller the classroom the more effective a teacher can be. I don't think anybody here can legitimately stand up and disagree with that.

Imagine having a class of 21 students versus 33. When you say, "Well, the pupil/teacher ratio is this, this, and this," you forget that we do need counselors; we do need administrators; we do need special education teachers. All that gets factored in. So you can talk about pupil/teacher ratio and say, "Oh, it's 21

students per class," but in reality it comes to well over 30 in many instances.

I did see one classroom in Legal, in fact, with a very small enrollment, just because the numbers worked and other classrooms were higher. The things that that teacher did with those students and the projects they came out with and the fantastic work they have done just goes to prove what wonderful work we could do if we had a lower enrollment in each one of those classrooms across the province. Those students in that class definitely have an advantage over students in another class with 30 kids in it if they have only 20. It's a given that no one – no one – can truly argue with any credibility.

5:10

So I am disappointed to see that education was not truly addressed in this budget. You've virtually handled the increase in enrollment. Imagine what public education could have done with the 20 percent increase to their budget that private schools got. I find it quite interesting that this government could find their way to a 20 percent increase for private schools but not a 20 percent increase for public schools. That doesn't sit well with me, and that certainly doesn't balance from my perspective where a government should be providing publicly funded education and doing a good job of it.

I would venture to say that if the minister really did an analysis – what is it costing us for teachers on stress leave, administrators on stress leave, on what could end up a strike in Edmonton? When a Premier can ask for a 5 percent unilateral cut, why wasn't that 5 percent unilaterally given back? Every problem in education the minister says: hey, talk to the school boards. Yet he envelopes every single dollar and how they can spend it.

MR. MAR: Not true.

MRS. SOETAERT: I'm so glad that the minister is always here to interject and to listen. I think it would be quite an honour to be a minister in this province. Therefore, if you're the Minister of Education, instead of saying: how can we destroy public education – I'm not saying you say that, Mr. Minister. I'm saying that you should be saying in your caucus: I want to make this the finest in all of Canada, and in order to do that, I need more of this budget.

AN HON. MEMBER: More money.

MRS. SOETAERT: You bet more money. You can still balance the books. You can pay down the debt, and you can provide quality education with fewer kids in a classroom.

MR. LUND: Money, money, money.

MRS. SOETAERT: I haven't even started on Environment yet, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to get there.

I guess as a final comment on education I just want to say that being the minister is a great honour, and I would hope that you could fight for more public dollars for public education. There's nothing like a class of 22 as compared to a class of 32. Ten times more can be done with that group, and everyone here in their heart of hearts knows that. Everyone here knows that.

MR. MAR: How much would you need to do that?

MRS. SOETAERT: Actually, Minister of Education, if you have

an answer to that question, I wish you'd lay it on the table. That's an excellent suggestion on my part. Work it into the budget if you can. Isn't that a goal that we should have in this budget: to have smaller classes? Isn't that a goal we should work towards? You bet it is.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go the minister of environment's budget, if I may.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, just one more point on education. If we had the time and small groups, just think what we could do with some students. Why, we could reach for the top. We could take them to all levels and win national awards with the time and smaller groups. That might be something you could relate to as well.

I do want to talk about Environment for a minute. My concern – and I've had several calls about it – is the privatization of parks. In the long run are we truly saving money when we close all those provincial parks? When you balance it out against quality of life? There have been concerns about Wabamun provincial park closing. What will that do to the economy of the town of Wabamun if that provincial park closes? Another one today from the Grande Prairie area. What will that do if those are closed? I'm sure that the representative of the Wabamun area has had many calls to his office and even from the mayor.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Just from you.

MRS. SOETAERT: From me. He says that I called his office. Not likely, Mr. Speaker. However, I do know that the mayor in Wabamun has been very concerned, as well he should be. I'm hoping that the minister was incorrectly quoted in the newspaper – because we shouldn't use newspapers, as you said, Mr. Speaker – when he said: well, we can just leave it for day areas because people will pick up their own garbage. Well, you know what? In utopia they might, and wouldn't that be nice? But the reality is there will be garbage, and it will be a mess, and that would be a sad state of affairs for that provincial park at Wabamun that has served so many people, not just in this area, not just in your riding, but from all over the world that stop by part of the tourist attraction of Alberta.

I wonder if the minister's really done an analysis: as this government closes provincial parks, what's it going to cost the economy? Who's going to travel through beautiful Alberta when there are no places to stop? They come in their motor homes, and they've been going to different lakes and fishing and enjoying the scenery and the beauty that Alberta has, and now they see a closed sign on it or the fact that they're not maintained anymore or cleaned, kept up, patrolled. When that happens, the buzz will be out: "Don't go to Alberta. Their parks have gone for naught." I have real concerns about that. That's a quality of life balance that I feel has been forgotten in this budget, and so I would urge the minister to look at what is happening there.

I want to speak for a minute about municipalities. I know every one of us all have different towns and villages, and maybe we represent part of a city. I know they have all spoken to us about the downloading of the provincial government over the last few years, and now they're saying, "Enough is enough." You haven't had to raise taxes. Bravo. Good for you. Well, they have through user fees, but it's a good smoke-and-mirrors move. However, you give it to the municipalities, and they have to do all the things that you used to do: maintaining some of the roads – there's a higher percentage they pay of that – inspecting bridges. All those infrastructure dollars that used to be far more supported

by this government, they don't have that anymore. They're enjoying the boom of more people coming into their towns, but they are not enjoying the money that should come with it for infrastructure. I don't see that balance in this budget, and as those municipalities have to inflict higher taxes – and how often have we all said it: same taxpayer, just a different pocket – we all pay more. The debt goes down faster. Bravo. But we have lost that balance of quality of life as our roads get beaten up as we drive on them. Well, maybe if you have a luxury vehicle, it doesn't wear down as quickly. I couldn't help myself, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MITCHELL: Or if you have four cars.

MRS. SOETAERT: Or if you have four cars, you could go through quite a few roads before there will be a little wear and tear.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's fair what this government has done to municipalities, because they hold the bag for their decisions. There's resentment there, and there should be resentment there.

There are a few more things within this. The infrastructure that I spoke about. And you know what else? What's interesting, Mr. Speaker, was the 22-cents-per-day tax cut. Now, you now what? I'll take 22 cents extra in my pockets. Every day? That would be wonderful. The reality is that I don't want my dad bumped from surgery, and if you gave me that choice and said, "You know, Colleen, you can either have 33 kids in a class or 29 kids in a class or 25 kids in a class, but you'd have to give up your 22 cents a day," I'd say take the 22 cents a day, because maybe that's the Liberal part of me that says I want my kids, everyone's children to have the very best public education they can. I want my dad to get the surgery when he needs it. I don't want him lined up, and I don't want him staying on a stretcher for 28, 30 hours in the emergency room. I'll give up the 22 cents a day for that. Then if oil bottoms out again, suddenly we're going: "Uh-oh. Why did we give back that 22 cents a day?" So I don't think that was a balanced approach.

Maybe it was the ideology of the decision for that tax cut. [Interjections] 'Idiotology.' That's a new one. I don't think it's in *Beauchesne*. If it wasn't just a feel-good image kind of thing that the government thought they would do rather than saying, "We'll keep that park open so that families can go there," or rather than: "Let's have one less child in every classroom in this province. Let's have seniors able to cross health boundaries because it'll mean that much more money out there." That's the balance that I found missing in this budget.

5:20

I am grateful for some of the expenditures. For example, there was more money that went to women's shelters. That was a good move, regrettably a necessary move that we need the shelters in this province, but it's a reality of our province. That I support. But I truly feel that the balance in this budget is missing. So I urge the government – well, we have a bunch of supplementary estimates I know that we'll deal with as we go. [Mrs. Soetaert's speaking time expired.]

Mr. Speaker, I can't believe it. How time flies when you're having fun. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 31 at this time.

THE SPEAKER: All those members in favour of the motion as put forward by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

Bill 32
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 1998 (No. 2)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer third reading of Bill 32.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, entering debate, third reading, Bill 32, the supplementary estimates, the second time that we've had to deal with supplementary estimates so far this session, and it could very well not be the last time. I note that it is only March 24, so I guess there are still seven shopping days left for the Provincial Treasurer to come back in with yet another supplementary estimate bill.

I would guess that after tomorrow's cabinet meeting, where the Minister of Health finally might be able to get what he needs in terms of permission from the parsimonious . . . [interjections] Was it today? Mr. Speaker, this is great news. Through you, sir, I'm so pleased to hear. I was able to pick up some of the chatter coming from the front bench that cabinet actually did meet, and it was today. If that's true, it could be another supplementary estimate day. Any minute now we'll be able to see. Every day tends to run into the other, and here I was thinking today was Monday, and it was Tuesday all day long. So we had that cabinet meeting. Maybe we'll see Bill 33 be the appropriation, supplementary supply, act, 1998, No. 3, and that'd be okay.

But today we're talking about the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998 (No. 2), and if this was still the days of Dick Johnston, this would simply be a special warrant. So I guess things have improved a little bit, that we don't do it by special warrant, that it actually comes in by supplementary estimates. The major portion of the supplementary estimates, as we all know, is to fight off the dreaded millennium bug, \$130 million worth of the millennium bug, and we've have some considerable debate in this House. I notice that many government members, many supporters of the government in the Assembly are using their laptop computers in the House, and I know they're probably all trying to deal with that millennium bug right here. Apparently you can deal with the millennium bug while you're playing solitaire.

That being said, the other part of the supplementary estimate that I wanted to refer to has to do with the money that has been

requested by the offices of the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Ethics Commissioner, and the Information and Privacy Commissioner. The total amount of these dollars does not appear to be very high, and it's all money that will be used for performance bonuses for the public servants who work and toil in these legislative offices on behalf of all Albertans.

Actually, I'm a member of the Leg. Offices Committee, and as a member of that committee, a presentation was made by the legislative officers, who made a wonderful case on behalf of their employees, that they should be able to share in the government's performance recognition and reward initiative. I supported it at that committee, and I guess I'm going to have to figure out how I can support it here as well, while I'm not really in favour of this kind of budgeting, this kind of a process. This leads me to a real conundrum, because while I think this might be a good use of funds, to reward and recognize the excellent service of members of the public service, the difficulty is that this shouldn't have been a surprise. I mean, the fact that this is coming up in a supplementary estimate indicates that it was somewhat of a surprise, and it shouldn't have been.

Maybe what we need to find out from the Minister of Labour or maybe from the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs or maybe from the Treasurer is why there wasn't better co-ordination or at least discussion amongst all of these cabinet ministers when they were sitting down and putting together their budget. Why would the legislative officers have to come, sort of, you know, cap in hand asking for a supplementary estimate, when it could have been part of the Legislative Assembly main estimates, which could have come before this House when we were debating the entire supply for the government?

It seems that if we could include in the Legislative Assembly estimates the salaries for the legislative officers and the salaries for the staff in those offices, and if there had been some more discussion and sharing between the Public Service Commission and the leg. offices, maybe through even employing perhaps the Speaker's good graces, there could have been some co-ordination so that these leg. offices would not have had to come outside of the regular budget cycle for their office and ask whether or not their employees were considered as important to the public service as all the other employees in the public service. Then we wouldn't have to be dealing with this portion of a supplementary estimate, which never reflects well on a government.

In fact what it suggests is some disarray on the part of the government, and it suggests some lack of cohesion on the part of the government. It suggests that people in one quarter of government offices aren't talking to people in another quarter of government offices, and perhaps there might even be some acrimony or discord in and amongst the government, particularly between the government and some parts of the public service. That's why I'm a little bit worried, and that is all in speaking to why this bill, Bill 32, presents a conundrum for me.

Mr. Speaker, I note that it is within seconds of 5:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30]