

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Tuesday, April 7, 1998 1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/04/07

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

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

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

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition today signed by 1,593 Albertans who are petitioning the Assembly "to urge the Government of Alberta to move immediately to elect the Boards of Alberta's Regional Health Authorities" and further urging that "the elections take place in all [RHAs] during the 1998 municipal elections."

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to present a petition signed by 125 people who live in the Cold Lake area who are very concerned that "we the public find ourselves in a situation as we know our ground water is contaminated" with arsenic.

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 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, and 83.

I am also giving notice that tomorrow I'll move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table with the Assembly today four copies of the Environmental Protection security fund annual report, April 1, 1996, to March 31, 1997, and also four copies of the Tire Recycling Management Association of Alberta annual report for the year 1996-97.

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

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table this afternoon copies of the Alberta Dairy Control Board annual report and also the annual report of production and sales for the Alberta Dairy Control Board.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

DR. WEST: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table answers to written questions 3 and 4.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have with your permission three separate tablings that I'd like to make to the Assembly. The first is five copies each of four separate postcards which read, "Stop private, for-profit health care!" These postcards are to be sent to the Prime Minister of Canada, the federal Minister of Health, the Premier of the province of Alberta, and the provincial Health minister, and they are calling for "a Royal Commission to examine the privatization of our health care system."

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a report generated by the Edmonton-*Glenora* constituency office, and it details the 82 contacts that I've received through my constituency office regarding the Delwin Vriend Supreme Court of Canada decision. What it details is that there were 82 contacts received by my office.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Let's move on.

DR. WEST: What did they say?

MR. SAPERS: Well, I was going to tell that.

The final tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies each of a letter from Rabbi bat Joseph of the Temple Beth Ora congregation to the Leader of the Official Opposition, copies of similar correspondence to the Premier of the province of Alberta, and copies of the Rabbi's sermon from March 13, 1998, all of which taken together implore the government to stand up for the rights of minorities who are discriminated against and not impose the notwithstanding clause in this province when it comes to human rights.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings. The first one is the first nine amendments to Bill 37, amendments designed to protect public health care and to give MLAs a chance to see them before we get to debate on that.

The second tabling is a letter from the Reverend Dr. George Rodgers, executive secretary of the United Church of Canada, dated April 6, 1998, affirming the support of the United Church of Canada, Alberta and Northwest Conference, for the Supreme Court of Canada's recent decision.

The final tabling I've got: in anticipation of Motion 510 later today I'm tabling the July 1996 report of the Calgary regional health authority maternal-newborn regional program, Report of the Working Group on Pregnancy Termination.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the opposition's fundamental amendment to Bill 27. It's anticipated that it shall come up sometime in order to have a full debate. This particular amendment will do as the minister has so aptly put many times, guarantee full benefits . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Let's move on. This is not debate. [interjection] Hon. member, please sit down. Let's move forward.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you members of the home school group from grade 3 to grade 9 from the Sexsmith area. The students are accompanied by Ian Sewall, a teacher, and Wenda Housego, a teacher, as well as Brenda Jewell, Kathy Ostrander, Kathleen McDace, Delilah Sterr, Anne Tomalty, and Mr. and Mrs. Dautel. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it's a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 47 grade 10 students from the Innisfail junior/senior high school. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Al Rodatz and Mr. Dick Lemke. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them to rise to receive the warm welcome.

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

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 17 visitors seated in the public gallery: 15 students from Chipman school accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Allen DUBYK, and also Mr. Gary McLachlan, their bus driver. I wish them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a resident of Three Hills and the wife of the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills who is seated in the members' gallery, Mrs. Janis Marz. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a constituent of mine, Mr. Clarence Schaufele. Mr. Schaufele is joining us today, and he's very interested in health funding. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before we proceed to Oral Question Period, I'd received notice earlier today that an hon. member wanted to present a report under Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees. With your concurrence could we revert to that item on the agenda?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that indulgence.

The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had a certain bill under consideration and wishes to report as follows: the committee recommends that Bill Pr. 3, the Alberta Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 1998, proceed with an amendment. As part of this report I will be tabling five copies of the amendment proposed for this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the request for concurrence in the report from the Standing Committee on Private Bills, would those members in favour of the request, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. It's carried. Mr. Clerk, we may now proceed.

head: **Oral Question Period
Sexual Orientation**

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, twice in recent days the Premier has said clearly that he will not invoke the notwithstanding clause on the Vriend case. He said it last Thursday in a broadly publicized press conference, and he said it yesterday in this Legislature, this very place. To the Premier: since there seems to be some concern about judges making political decisions, why doesn't the government simply bring a bill to the Assembly which would write these provisions into Alberta legislation, thereby making this a decision by elected representatives of the people of Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, whether any individual in this caucus or the Liberal caucus likes it or not, the fact is that the Supreme Court of Canada has read it into our human rights legislation. It is now, as I speak, the law of this land.

MR. MITCHELL: Given that the government has presented to this Legislative Assembly right now on the Order Paper Bill 25, the Justice Statutes Amendment Act, 1998, which accommodates another recent Supreme Court decision, why won't the Premier insist upon doing the same thing to reflect the recent Vriend decision in Alberta legislation? You've already done it in the one case; why don't you do it in this case?

MR. KLEIN: Good question, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. member will allow me, I'll have the hon. Minister of Justice respond.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Premier. Unlike the Vriend decision, the Wickman decision, which is being referred to by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, did not require reading into our existing legislation. It was a direction from the courts that we had to, for example, set up the Judicial Compensation Commission and make some other changes to our existing

legislation to have it comply. They also gave us until, I believe, September 18 of this year to do so.

So while the question was a good one, the analogy doesn't apply. With respect to Vriend it's been read into our legislation. With respect to the Wickman decision it has not.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, given that gay people are our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, sons and daughters, and, yes, in fact mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers, why is it so difficult for this government to make a definitive statement about treating members of Alberta's families fairly? All of them.

MR. KLEIN: I take it that question was to me, Mr. Speaker. Various people have various views on this issue. Certainly letters were tabled today from members of the Jewish and Christian clergy. There have been many, many letters received by my office from other denominations expressing exactly the opposite view. When I read the newspapers – maybe this is a good day to stop reading the newspapers. [interjections] No, really. I find that the *Sun* is pushing me this way, and the Southam newspapers are pushing me that way.

What do I think personally? I abhor the thought of discrimination of any kind. Notwithstanding our concerns over the latitude the court has taken in this case and the concern that is being expressed as to who makes the laws in this country, we'll speak to the decision. The decision was probably the right decision. Had the court, for instance, accepted Mr. Justice Major's recommendation, we would have been able to do what the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition suggested, but that didn't happen, Mr. Speaker.

When we speak to the issue, let's be clear on the issue. I guess one of the most disturbing things to me – and I don't want to get emotional about this – is some of the comments that are being made by individuals who are reading a lot more into this than there actually is. Mr. Speaker, this is about giving people the right to go to the Human Rights Commission on matters of residency, employment, services, and so on. It's the right to be heard. That's all.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In December of 1995 this government published its response to the Equal in Dignity report and the 75 unanimous recommendations from that citizen panel. In its formal response this government said that the recommendation on sexual orientation would be dealt with through the Vriend court case. The Supreme Court last Thursday noted that statement and concluded that such a statement was “an express invitation for the courts to read sexual orientation into the [law].” To the Premier: how can the Premier complain, as he has since last Thursday, about judicial activism when it was his government which invited the court to resolve a problem his divided caucus perhaps wouldn't allow him to deal with? He invited the court to solve his political dilemma.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the excerpt from that report, Our Commitment to Human Rights. Recommendation 60 was that

sexual orientation be included among the grounds listed in the IRPA on which people are protected against discrimination, and that this protection apply to all areas.

The recommendation at that time was not accepted by government with the comment: “This recommendation will be dealt with through the current court case.” We had no idea as to what the courts were going to say at that particular time, but we assumed that one way or another the courts would deal with this matter.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier further why since last Thursday he's been attempting to blame the courts for simply interpreting a law which the Alberta provincial government played a major role in terms of bringing into force; namely, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there's a big difference between interpreting the law and adjudicating the law and whether in fact the law is discriminatory or not and making some rulings as to what we should do with the law. But never in our wildest dreams did we anticipate that they were actually going to read it into our law, that they were going to amend our law. I don't think that the Liberal opposition expected that either. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Hon. Minister of Energy, there's an opportunity outside this Assembly for you to carry on the debate with yourself. Right now the floor has been given to the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Sexual Orientation (continued)

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My final question would be this. In light of the response that the Premier had given to the Leader of the Official Opposition, I might come back and ask the Premier: what specific role will the Premier and his Minister of Justice play in informing Albertans in an accurate and objective fashion of the very limited scope of the Supreme Court of Canada decision? What will we do in terms of ensuring that Albertans have accurate information and get past the myths, the stereotypes, and the nonsense we're reading in the paper and media?

MR. KLEIN: Right. I couldn't agree with the hon. member more. We need to have a clear message. It needs to be communicated clearly as to what this decision actually means, notwithstanding – and I hate to use that word – the way it was handed down but really what it means.

Mr. Speaker, this issue is coming to our caucus on Thursday. The Minister of Justice, the Minister of Community Development, the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs, the Provincial Treasurer, my office: we're all working on it. We're receiving the input of our caucus members. Certainly we're receiving the input of our constituents, and boy, the opinions do vary.

1:50

MRS. SLOAN: It's not an issue of public opinion.

MR. KLEIN: Well, we have to listen to . . . Mr. Speaker, the question was: this is not a matter for public opinion. I'm sorry. This is a matter for public opinion.

So, Mr. Speaker, certainly part of the consideration is how this is communicated. How this is communicated. I think it's very, very important that we communicate clearly that this decision – this decision – speaks only to the right of an individual to appeal

to the Human Rights Commission on the basis of sexual orientation. That's all it speaks to.

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

Children's Advocate

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the government released its responses to the recommendations of the Alberta Growth Summit. These totaled 243 specific recommendations. The government also has made a lot of effort in the last while to claim that they support children. My question to the Premier: why is it that your government ignored the recommendation of the Growth Summit and did not strengthen the Children's Advocate?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that we reacted. Certainly we responded to all of the recommendations. We responded to all the recommendations. There was never a suggestion that we would accept overnight all of the recommendations.

Relative to the recommendations vis-à-vis the Children's Advocate, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the issues from the Growth Summit came back as to what exactly the role of the Children's Advocate is. We feel in this province that the Children's Advocate has a very important role to play. We are presently going through a redesign of children's services, and what we are attempting to do is determine how the Children's Advocate's office relates to the children's services authorities.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we're going through a departmental reorganization. I can assure the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East that the Children's Advocate remains and will continue to remain a very important part of this government.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again either to the Premier or back to the minister: given the redesign of children's services that the minister spoke about, is it not important that we have a strong, functional child's advocate as we move to more and more arm's-length decision-making from the elected legislators? We have to have a strong child's advocate.

DR. OBERG: Quite simply, yes.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah, but you're not doing it.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, I gather that one of the key leaders of your cheerleading squad is the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. I also understand that it's your 42nd birthday today, hon. member. It's probably time to act your age in this Assembly.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Children's Advocate (continued)

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will you commit that as the redesign of children's services is initiated and implemented, there will be a strong review and a strong place for the Children's Advocate, so that children or parents who feel they are not properly treated will have an alternative route to express their concerns?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that there is a solid commitment to the protection of children in this province. Certainly the Children's Advocate plays a major role relative to that responsibility.

Again I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I had mentioned previously, the Children's Advocate is a very important part of children's services in this province. It's something we believe in, something we strongly believe in, something we strongly endorse. So the very short answer to your third question, hon. member, is absolutely yes, the Children's Advocate will retain a very important role in this province as the children's services authorities are brought forward.

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

Sexual Orientation (continued)

MS BARRETT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In the last few days the debate about the Vriend decision has become quite disturbing. I'll quote from a flyer that is being handed out to homes in Edmonton. One says, "The Supreme Court of Canada has now" – listen to the language – "ordered the Province of Alberta to grant homosexuality special status under its Individual's Rights Protection Act." Another one, from this leaflet that misstates and distorts the facts says:

The Vriend decision will force the province to intrude in private affairs regarding employment, childcare, landlord-tenant relations, education and religion to promote homosexuality.

[interjections] No, no. These are being delivered door-to-door.

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah, they are. I know.

MS BARRETT: Absolutely.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier doesn't endorse garbage like this. I liked his statement. But I would like the Premier to clarify. Since the Alberta government said in 1995 that it wanted to defer to the decision of the courts on the Vriend decision, will the Premier agree that there is no concern about judicial activism, for the courts were doing just what the province asked them to do?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that we had some anticipation of the ruling; that is, the ruling relative to the human rights legislation being in violation of the Charter. I think there was a good indication that when the Supreme Court heard the case, they were going to rule in favour of Mr. Vriend. We anticipated that. Never did we anticipate that they were going to actually read it into the legislation. We anticipated that they would instruct us to amend the legislation, being in violation of the Charter. Had they agreed with Mr. Justice Jack Major, we would have had a year to do this.

But, Mr. Speaker, all this document says relative to recommendation 60 is that "this recommendation will be dealt with through the current court case," and it made no further comment.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can the Premier express concern about so-called judicial activism and court intrusion when it's his own government that's currently embroiled in a constitutional fight in the courts over gun control? Double standard I see.

MR. KLEIN: Well, there are many issues I guess that will be – well, we don't have a problem with gun control, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, we support gun control, and we support measures to keep guns out of the hands of the bad guys. We strongly support very severe punishment for those who use weapons in the commission of a crime, to rob a bank or to, God forbid, murder someone. But we do oppose the whole idea of registration as it is now framed relative to violating the rights of people to their property. Basically, this legislation in our mind offends those people who properly use their firearms for target practice or for hunting or for other recreational activities and not for crime.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier take active steps to appeal to Alberta's higher judgment by communicating that the Vriend decision was about fundamental human rights and nothing else, to communicate that it's not about any special status?

MR. KLEIN: Well, that goes to the question that was asked by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I think it has to be. You know, I would appeal to the media, but I don't know. Is it going to do any good?

Mr. Speaker, we will work out a communications plan. As I said, this is coming to our caucus on Thursday. I agree that it has to be clearly enunciated that this is about giving the people the right to go to the Human Rights Commission on issues like residency, employment, and services based on sexual orientation. That's what it's all about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

2:00 Federal Taxation Review

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday a report called the Mintz report was released by the federal government. It was an extensive review of taxes in Canada. My question to the Provincial Treasurer is: could he please explain to us what the implications are for our Alberta taxes?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, in '96 the federal government commissioned a taxation and business review, and they asked Professor Mintz out of the University of Toronto, I believe, to chair that particular review. The report has now been released. There are some suggestions, some recommendations in that report which may find favour in some sectors of the economy and may actually concern other sectors. There are some related to oil and gas, for instance, where I think we might have some concern.

The federal Minister of Finance, Mr. Martin, contacted me last week, about a week before the report actually came out, to assure us that he was in fact not implementing this; he was seeing it as it was, which was a report. The recommendations basically are, among other things, to lower the corporate income tax rate; the provinces should actually follow suit and lower their corporate tax rates, whatever they are, by 1 percent. That's treading a little bit into provincial territory, quite frankly. They were saying that the broad-based approach to taxation is a better one than certain industries having certain favoured status. That's an oversimplified version of what some of the recommendations in the report were talking about.

MS HALEY: My second question to the same minister is: could

you give us an indication of what the impact on the resource industry of Alberta might be?

MR. DAY: They take an interesting approach. The report, Mr. Speaker, said that the federal government really doesn't have a policy justification for having a tax on gasoline, for instance, which is, I think, 10 cents a litre, because in fact the federal government is not in the business of paving and building roads; the provincial governments are. They said that the taxation on gasoline, for instance, should come off and that that taxation or portions of it should be applied to certain resource-based industries: coal and mining and other things like that. Well, that starts to sound a bit like a carbon tax. So we have some concerns on that particular approach.

Again, we have the assurance, at least to date, that the federal government is not embracing this report; they're just putting it out there. But that gives the member an indication that there would be an effect if these were implemented on some aspects of our resource-based industry.

MS HALEY: Given that one of the recommendations is in fact to replace the federal fuel excise tax with an environmental broad-based tax, could you tell us what the impact of that would be?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, if that happened, it would mean that certain resource industries, which obviously are primarily based in Alberta, would be taxed more. That would make them less competitive. The report points out that as far as corporate tax goes generally, we're not competitive anywhere in Canada with the United States and we already lose business, and as businesses become increasingly mobile and increasingly transportable, we do lose business opportunities by business moving south of the border or in fact if they can find another jurisdiction where the taxes are lower. So the report at least is suggesting that we already have a competitive disadvantage there.

If implementation of this federal excise tax were to go ahead, as the federal government suggests, then we would have our resource-based industries in Alberta even less competitive with other areas, so it's something that we're looking at carefully. We'll be communicating in clear terms to the federal minister. We'll be working closely with the Minister of Energy on the particular issue too and also Economic Development.

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

Support for Municipalities

MR. GIBBONS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a fact: in Alberta the taxes will be going up. While the province denounces down-loading from the feds, our own municipalities struggle to cope with the impact of years of provincial cuts and neglect. The truth is that the province has left municipalities with no choice but to raise their property taxes. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why have you left municipalities with no choice but to raise their taxes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the question really is one that the constituents in municipalities should ask: do they need the tax increases and for what?

Mr. Speaker, it is not true that we haven't left choice. This year Municipal Affairs alone has provided dollars for assessments

– those weren't available last year – dollars for targeted municipal assistance and other support for restructuring. We have no evidence that we have not left them choice.

MR. GIBBONS: To the same minister: since there is only one taxpayer, what will the minister do today to help stop tax hikes to our municipalities?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Municipal Affairs take care of the assessments in the province. We undertake to audit assessments. We're doing even more to audit those assessments to make sure they're correct. We go throughout the province and conduct linear assessments. We're in the assessment business; municipalities are in the tax business. Municipalities are in the business of raising those taxes at a local level.

MR. GIBBONS: Why did the government reject the Growth Summit recommendations to share fuel tax revenue with the municipalities?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, our government through our Premier is leading the province in conducting an infrastructure review, and clearly the Premier has communicated that with the major cities, Edmonton and Calgary, the urban municipalities, the rural municipalities. They are all involved and at the table with our Premier to discuss those issues. We are similarly reviewing with the minister of transportation other issues that affect the infrastructure and municipalities. It is a work in progress in consultation with municipalities, and it's a responsible way of looking at adding dollars to municipalities.

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

Provincial Debt

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These questions are addressed to the Provincial Treasurer. This year we're going to be spending a billion dollars to pay the interest on our accumulated debt, and that's down \$400 million from four years ago. Although we have no choice but to keep paying until the debt is gone, it's a shame because of the positive things that we could be doing with a billion dollars. Tax reduction comes to mind or program funding or maybe even both. My questions to the Provincial Treasurer are for the sake of emphasizing this situation. Since Alberta began running deficit budgets in 1985 and subsequently accumulating a debt, what is the total amount that this province has spent on debt servicing costs or interest to date?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I know that this has been a concern for the Member for Peace River for some period of time. Actually, it's a concern that most Albertans share in terms of the size of the debt. These types of questions have been certainly good for us because we've had to do some work and kind of look back and look at the implications for a few years of this province falling into the Liberal pattern for a short period of time of accepting deficit financing as a way of doing business. Thankfully, Albertans woke us up and knocked us off of that track and got us on the right track.

If you go back to '85, as the member is asking, and look at the amount we have paid out in debt servicing costs, it comes to about

\$13 billion. The highest year was 1994-95. That particular year it was \$1.6 billion that we paid out in debt servicing. Now it's less than a billion. It's interesting to hear the Liberals still laughing about that. This is a very serious problem, and I'm glad the Member for Peace River has raised it.

MR. FRIEDEL: Still to the Provincial Treasurer, Mr. Speaker: of our 17 government departments, can he tell us how many are running their entire annual budget for less money than the billion dollars that we're going to be spending on interest this year?

MR. DAY: Well, it's an interesting way to look at it. Of 17 departments there are 13 that individually operate for less than a billion dollars. A billion dollars would just about cover the operating cost of running all the universities and colleges in the province. So when we're spending that just to service debt, it is a sober reminder of why we have in fact a law that says that we're not allowed to have a deficit, why we're going to maintain that, and why we shake our heads in wonder when we hear Liberals, even those aspiring to leadership, saying that having a deficit would not be a major problem for them.

MR. FRIEDEL: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the Treasurer could tell us: from the experience of the Treasury Department, what would be the effect on Alberta's credit rating if this province was debt free?

2:10

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, because we've been so aggressive about paying down our debt, we enjoy the best credit rating in the country, and that means an ongoing lighter load for all of Alberta's taxpayers. Of course if we had no debt at all, all I can say is that it would be even better than the best.

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

Advanced Education Tuition Fees

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The previous minister of advanced education dismissed the effectiveness of a legislated tuition cap, calling it a look good, feel good thing that would be easy to repeal. Now the current minister, while he claims that he's in favour of a cap – and we've even seen him wear it – at one point suggested that this tuition cap might be as high as 40 percent. Now, he recanted that when he was caught out. But this leaves some confusion in the minds of many Albertans, especially because student leaders are now being told by the minister that if they don't support the government's current 30 percent policy, there may not be any legislated tuition cap or, if there is a cap, it may be set much higher. So my questions are to the minister of advanced education. Will the minister commit that the government's irrevocable policy will be to legislate a cap on tuition fees?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, this is on the Order Paper for today, and I believe your previous rulings have indicated that . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: I listened very attentively to the question, and it has to do with a policy question.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we have made it a practice to

listen to student leaders as often as we can, and as a matter of fact the Premier of this province met with student leaders as well. We had a tremendous discussion on where the tuition levels should go and would be going in this particular province, and both of us at that particular time said: look; the current reality is that the policy of this government is that we have no interest in going beyond the 30 percent level for student investment in their postsecondary education. That of course has led to the bill that's currently in front of the House, and I'm sure we're going to hear the hon. member debate it this afternoon, and that is that we're bringing forward legislation that will put in place a cap of 30 percent.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister state on the record that he in no way intended to threaten student leaders by implying that if they did not support his 30 percent policy, the rate might be hiked?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, you know, this is rather an interesting little analysis perhaps of some of the discussion that's gone on. What in fact took place was, I thought, a very honest, open, forthright discussion with student leaders. The fact is that not everyone in Alberta is in favour of what this government is doing to try to protect students when it comes to levels of debt. There are some very powerful organizations in this province that have indicated not only to this minister but to this caucus that they wanted the tuition levels to go beyond that. This caucus has stood firm on behalf of students in this province, and we said: "Look; 30 percent is it. That's the cap. We're happy with that."

MR. SAPERS: Will the minister commit, then, to the Assembly that he would rather withdraw any bill or change any policy before he would allow the tuition cap to rise above the 30 percent?

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, on that basis you're now asking the minister to clearly get involved in debate of his bill. We'll move on, seeing as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora in fact has adjourned the debate and will have an opportunity later.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Health Care System

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Health. Over the last few decades health care has increasingly taken a larger percentage of the provincial program budget, with almost one-third of our program dollars being dedicated to health at this stage. In addition, our population in Alberta is aging and will put greater pressure on our health system to be shouldered by even fewer people in the future. What long-term plans is the minister looking at or are being made to manage this predictable yet increasing challenge?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the premise on which the question is based is correct. I think that is a tribute to the individuals themselves, the people in this province that are living longer through their own good management of their lives. In addition to that I think it's contributed to by the economic and social health of this province.

Certainly, in terms of planning for the future, the first I think

has to be continuing with our overall plan as a government from a fiscal standpoint. Now, at first glance that might not be thought to be a very important matter, Mr. Speaker, but it is. We need to be able in this province to have the resources, the ability to spend on a measured and planned basis in the area of health care. We need to be able to maintain our overall approach to pensions at both the provincial and federal level, and we need to be able to provide that basis of support to our senior population.

In addition to that of course, Mr. Speaker, we are working in Alberta Health with the stakeholders in this area to plan for long-term care accommodation, to plan for new models of care, particularly a model known as primary care, with our health professionals working as a team to serve the elderly. We have started with a number of initiatives in that area, and we are developing an overall approach to this change in our population pyramid.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you. Again to the Minister of Health: today with many of the hospital beds being occupied by people requiring long-term care, what alternatives are being pursued to resolve this growing and increasing problem of the beds being occupied?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have an initiative that was taken about a year and a half ago. It was referred to as our Best Practices initiative, where we were endeavouring to foster innovation in the health care system, particularly in the area of long-term care. We do have across the province a number of good models which can be utilized in other areas of the province in terms of providing for health care and accommodation.

I will just mention two examples. There are many more across the province that are part of an overall effort in Alberta Health. One is the CHOICE program here in Edmonton, where you have a centre which has a full range of health services available to seniors. It is a place where there is a capacity for respite care, where there is counseling and advice and help and support for people who are living in the community but do need the resources of the health care system.

Also in this city, Mr. Speaker, we have out in the complex surrounding the Misericordia hospital an assisted living model, which I think is very innovative, called Laurier House, where people can live in their own condominiums, I think you would call it, which are part of the complex but receive a level of care that is pertinent to their health needs, whether it be nursing care, simple meal service, or access to physicians. It is a continuum there, and that is being provided.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we do have under way a long-term care planning review chaired by the MLA for Redwater, and I'm looking forward to their recommendations in this overall area.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is again to the Minister of Health. Given that the emergency wards of our hospitals are used by many that could probably find those services elsewhere and maybe perhaps with their own doctors, what's being done to educate the public regarding the use of the facilities such as the hospitals and emergency wards?

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, there are certainly two parts to the answer. First of all, I gather from the hon. member's question that part of the answer may relate to our aging population. Certainly we need to have a good capacity to provide a continuity

of care when a person is ready to leave an acute care bed. There must be a bed or a facility or a program that will support that person so they can leave the acute care bed. This is usually both beneficial for the system and for the individual.

In terms of emergency wards in the general sense, yes, it has been a long-time problem that goes back many, many years. We do have people who do go to emergency who should be scheduling a visit to their local doctor, their local clinic. It is an ongoing problem that I think besets emergency wards all over North America. But there we do encourage the regional health authorities to communicate with their publics and to indicate that there are services available. The emergencies are for emergencies and should be used in that particular manner.

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

Misericordia Hospital COMPRU Clinic

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. COMPRU is an award-winning, internationally respected health service offered out of the Misericordia hospital and recognized as a model of excellence in health service by the Minister of Health and the Capital health authority. However, visiting today is a constituent of mine, Mr. Schaufele. Missing part of his jaw as a result of cancer, he visited the clinic every single day in 1996, receiving only one appointment. He has continued to visit the clinic weekly only to be told that there are no appointments available. To the Minister of Health: what advice does the minister have for Mr. Schaufele, whose life could be turned around with the services of COMPRU but who is continuously turned away because of a lack of resources?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the member is raising a particular individual case which I would certainly undertake to review the circumstances of. The situation with the COMPRU program, though, is that it is, as far as I understand it, one of a kind in Canada if not in North America, but certainly in Canada. I expect that there is a tremendous demand there, and I'm assuming that the dedicated people working in that unit are endeavouring to meet that demand.

In terms of the specifics of this case I certainly would undertake to review it.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you for that offer.

Given the provincial, national, and even international scope of this program, why is it not funded as a provincial program through Alberta Health?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that an application is being made to the provincial services committee which looks at the authorization of provincial programs. I am not questioning the case as the hon. member describes it, but I do think it's important for members of the Assembly to understand that the very valuable and futuristic work that the COMPRU clinic is doing does provide two areas of service. One is an area which is not an insured service but certainly of tremendous benefit to individuals and, of course, another area of service which it would seem that the case referred to falls into. In any case, that is a matter that it's my understanding will be considered by the provincial services review committee.

MS BLAKEMAN: To the same minister: why are Albertans needing the services of this world-renowned facility being denied?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I recognize that the member has raised an individual case, and I take note of that. But the point here is that I think there's another perspective that might be taken towards this particular matter. That is that Alberta residents are being provided a service which is not provided anywhere else, certainly in western Canada if not in Canada. I think that's a tribute to the accomplishments of our health care system.

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

Calgary Snowstorm

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During a recent severe snowstorm in Calgary, schools were closed, some businesses were closed, and there were public advisories issued asking people to stay home. A constituent of mine employed as a supervisor at a Calgary business told his staff to stay home for safety reasons. His manager contacted the staff and asked them to go work. The supervisor later had to resign from his job because he felt that the safety of the employees had been put at risk. My questions today are to the Minister of Labour. Can the minister please indicate if there is legislation in place that deals with safety at work?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After a scan of all the legislation there is the Occupational Health and Safety Act, which does deal with issues of health and safety in the workplace. It deals primarily with minimum standards that workers and employers and suppliers are expected to meet. The legislation, however, only applies to the work site. It does not apply to activity off the work site, such as travel to and from the work site, unless the travel is part of the work. So it's a difficult question in terms of when you have the elements such as the event in Calgary or, more notably, the events down east, the ice storm of January, February. I think that in a lot of cases the good rule of common sense often prevails.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Labour. Can the minister indicate if there is any employment protection available for workers who are asked to report to work even though there is public advice to stay at home?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the government tries not to interfere in individual employment relationships. There is an expectation that employees will adhere to the conditions of work as they're set by the employer as long as those conditions do not violate the law. With the snowstorm I know that the employees would be under the direction of their employers. Again, I think that people make the best of common sense in the interest of what is usually a company's most valued resource, and that is their employees.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Minister of Labour. Can the minister indicate who would be liable if a worker was injured in an accident while on the way to work in the case like I have described?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if an individual is not working at the time of an accident, the liability, I expect, would be a matter for private insurers and the courts to determine. I think that the matter that the member has rightfully brought to the attention of the Legislature is an issue where a supervisor felt a

particular condition existed and advised his immediate area of supervision, his employees that reported to him, not to report to work under difficult circumstances. I also understand in this issue that a manager above the supervisor then actually phoned the staff and asked them to come in to work. So there were some internal management problems at work here. The interesting side of it is that this is the only issue that has come to the attention of this minister.

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

Workers' Incomes

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under this government Alberta has become a place where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer or laid off. This government's own handpicked Calgary regional health authority reports that since 1990, 50 percent of Calgarians who earn the least money are working harder and harder for less and less on payday. Calgary's health authority also reveals that fully one-half of working Calgarians have been left out of the economic recovery. My first question is to the Minister of Labour. Given that last Thursday you claimed that one of the purposes of your government was to see pay packets increase, why have the real pay packets of half the workers in Canada's most prosperous city been decreasing under your government? Why have you left those people out?

2:30

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that anybody's let anybody down, except maybe the quality of the questions coming from the member over the last four months, but that's for him to deal with, not for us.

Mr. Speaker, I think the member refers to a study done that talks about salary numbers below a median income level. You know, I haven't looked in detail at the study. What I can tell the hon. member is that, firstly, I believe Alberta has the lowest level of taxation in the country, so there is evidence that points to less government intrusion into the pay packet. Secondly, Albertans consistently make 8 to 9 percent above Canadians' average take-home earnings on a weekly basis. I think we'd find ample evidence to argue very much to the contrary of this prognosticator of doom.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's real GDP increased by over 18 percent between 1990 and 1995, why did the real incomes for one-half of Calgarians fall by 15 percent over the same period? I did table the documents for you to read.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to make a comment on the veracity of the member's data, but what we do know is that from 1993 to 1997 the GDP increased about \$17 billion, 18 percent, in this province. We also know that over 200,000 new jobs were created in this province over the last five years, and we know that governments don't have a lot of power and influence in changing the way people are being paid. In fact, people are paid on a productivity basis. There have been certain productivity changes in the marketplace in Alberta, and wages are reflected accordingly.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, if the ministers across the way

were getting paid on a productivity basis, some of them would be getting a small paycheque.

How much more job and strike action by decent, hard-working Albertans is required to make this minister realize that this government's labour and economic development policies are leaving more and more Albertans behind in its economic recovery? [interjections]

head:

Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Three hon. members have indicated their intent today to provide a member's statement. We'll proceed in this order: first of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Paul Wacko

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to rise and pay tribute to a great Albertan and Edmontonian, Paul Wacko, who passed away on April 1, 1998. On April 4 Paul was laid to rest with hundreds of his friends and family in attendance at St. Joseph's basilica to say farewell. Born and raised in Nova Scotia, Paul graduated from St. Francis Xavier University with a degree in chemistry, then moved west to Edmonton. He was employed with the Inland Group of Companies for his entire 42-year career. Initially hired as a chemist in 1956, Paul progressed through the ranks, which included serving as president and then chairman at the time of his death.

Besides his duties with the Inland group, Paul found time to work creating economic growth in his favourite city, the city of Edmonton, as well as the province. His belief that governments and private sector working together in the area of education and research and development could be a catalyst to create economic development led him to get involved with numerous boards, foundations, and councils.

Paul also found time to donate some of his precious time to the charitable sector, including the United Way and Olympic Trust of Canada. For his efforts, on January 30, 1998, Paul was honoured as the inaugural recipient of the President's Northern Light award of distinction by the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce.

Paul was a wonderful father and grandfather. He was eulogized by his three grown children as: a kind, loving father who taught us the importance of integrity and honesty. His six grandchildren were his pride and joy.

Thank you, Paul, for all you did for our province, the city of Edmonton, and everyone you came in contact with. We're going to miss you.

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

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On July 1, 1867, the Constitution Act came into effect. Over time our colonial ties to Britain gradually fell away. The 1931 Statute of Westminster in addition to the development of conventions underscoring Canada's independence were forerunners to the repatriation in 1982.

On April 17, 1982, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II signed the Royal Proclamation bringing Canada's Constitution into force, thereby entrenching the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Alberta was a signatory and supporter of this amendment to the highest law of Canada. The Charter was put in place to uphold and safeguard the fundamental rights of Canadians from

being overruled by any government. The notwithstanding clause was an addition to ensure provincial sovereignty could not be limited by the judiciary. When Alberta pressed for the addition of this clause, it was to enhance the rights of Albertans, never to abrogate the basic rights of our minorities.

The role of the courts is merely to interpret and apply the laws and the Constitution. The independence of the judiciary is critical to this role. Justice Iacobucci stated in the decision on *Delwin Vriend* versus the province of Alberta that:

it is suggested that this appeal represents a contest between the power of the democratically elected legislatures to pass the laws they see fit, and the power of the courts to disallow those laws, to dictate that certain matters be included in those laws. To put the issue in this way is misleading and erroneous. Quite simply, it is not the courts which limit the legislature. Rather, it is the Constitution, which must be interpreted by the courts, that limits the legislatures.

It is clear that some members of the Legislature, including the Premier, and some members of the general public do not understand this important distinction. I urge all members of this Legislature to educate themselves about the role of the courts and their own function as a vital part of our legislative process. Our job is to make the laws, laws that are equitable to all, and the job of the court is to apply and interpret those laws.

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

Stu Hart

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize Stu Hart, a constituent and an Alberta sport legend who was named to the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame in 1980. Stu has been associated with athletics all of his life, whether on local, national, or international levels. Stu Hart is also known as a gentleman, a good citizen, one ready to aid a worthy community cause, and a fine example to the youth of Alberta.

Stu is a native of Saskatoon. He moved to Edmonton in 1929, where he developed in wrestling through the YMCA to become middleweight champion at the dominion amateur championships in 1937. He was designated to represent Canada at the 1940 Olympic Games, which were canceled because of World War II. Even while competing Stu found time to coach wrestling from 1935 to 1942 at the University of Alberta. During four years of service in the Canadian Navy, Stu also wrestled in fundraising events and in matches to help entertain the troops. As a young man Stu played senior fastball and hardball with the Edmonton Southside Athletic Club and participated in junior soccer and cricket. He also played football with the Edmonton Eskimos.

In 1946 Stu embarked on a pro wrestling career in New York City, where he also met and married his beloved Helen, who proved to be the only one to tame Stu in the ring or out for 50 years.

In 1948 Stu turned to promoting wrestling, initially in Edmonton, which he pursued for 32 years. In 1952 he started Stampede Wrestling in Calgary, but he also took the sport to smaller Alberta communities. Stu has served his Calgary community well, having put on benefit wrestling cards for such organizations as the Cancer Society and Community Chest. Top world wrestlers including Gene Kiniski, Joe "Tiger" Tommaso and Stu's eight sons got their start in Stu Hart's gym with his skillful training. He tells me his referees included Jack Dempsey and Phil Klein, the Premier's father. To quote a friend, Rabbi Lewis Ginsberg: Stu Hart is a credit to the athletic arena and even more so to the arena of life.

I totally support his sentiment and am very proud to recognize Stu Hart, Alberta's sport legend.

Thank you.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: Before proceeding with Orders of the Day, Government House Leader, do you want to raise a point of order, or do you want me to make a comment?

MR. HAVELOCK: Please make a comment.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Okay, and I'm quite prepared to do that under 13(2).

During the question period today there was an interjection by the Government House Leader. The Government House Leader indicated that the question raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development in essence would be on projected government business today.

The Speaker is not sure that all hon. members of the Assembly in fact would have known that. For day 40, Tuesday, April 7, what today's Order Paper has on it under second reading is Bill 40. Now, it may very well be that an internal report may exist that basically says that Bill 35 would be the one substituting for Bill 40, and perhaps that knowledge would have been made aware to the hon. Opposition House Leader. If that is the case, then I think a little greater diligence might be employed with respect to that kind of situation. But the chair also listened very attentively and basically allowed two questions to go and the third one not to go because the third one seemed to be clearly within the breach of anticipation of the certain debate that might be forthcoming.

Having said that, you've all heard me say before that I try to have a minimal amount of interjections in this House to allow the greatest amount of flexibility in terms of the flow of the question period. If the chair would have interjected on that point and ruled that one out, the chair would have also been in a position to have ruled out three other questions today. The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View got up and cited a federal report, and it is not within the administrative competence of this House to deal with a federal report. The hon. Member for Calgary-North West raised questions with respect to future health concerns, and the Speaker looks at at least six bills with respect to health on this particular Order Paper in front of him. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort asked for a legal opinion from the Minister of Labour. It is not the purpose of question period to seek legal opinions.

So one has, I repeat, tried to find the greatest amount of latitude to allow hon. members to do the best possible job they can for their constituents and to allow the greatest amount of free flow in question period without interference. So having done that, if one wants to really, really raise these interjections and points of order, I think that on your 40th day of this session, which, by the way, to my knowledge is the longest uninterrupted sitting of this Legislative Assembly – some sessions are much longer than 40 days, but there's usually a break. You have not yet arrived at a break. To my knowledge, you have never gone for 40 days in a row without having a break, and that may be a reflection of certain things forthcoming in the House. So this is day 40. Tomorrow will be day 41. Then it'll be day 42. Then there'll be an opportunity for a brief break, and perhaps something might

proceed a little differently. So I hope that provides some further understanding with respect to this.

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

Bill 211
Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, 1998

[Debate adjourned March 31: Mr. Klapstein speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to continue speaking to Bill 211.

Alberta has accepted this obligation, and consistent with the Constitution Act, part 1, section 4 of Alberta's Legislative Assembly Act states that "there shall be a sitting of the Legislature at least once every 12 months."

Mr. Speaker, we are not doing anything new here. Historically, fall sessions are not the norm in this province. In fact, they are not the norm in the majority of provinces in Canada. In five of the last 12 years fall sessions were not held in this province. Since Alberta became a province in 1905, there have been many years in which the Legislature did not sit twice per year. In fact, more than one 10-year period exists where fall sittings did not occur at all.

The provinces of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island also have legislation that mirrors Alberta's. These Legislative Assemblies are required to sit once every 12 months and, like Alberta, will sit twice when there is an urgent matter before the province. It is also interesting, Mr. Speaker, that in the United States 43 of the 50 states meet only once a year for between 40 and 90 days, depending on state laws.

It is important to remember that each day this Legislative Assembly sits, it costs Alberta taxpayers \$15,000. I would like to make it clear that this issue is not simply about dollars. I don't think there are any members sitting in the Assembly today who can honestly say that their constituents would agree to spending this kind of money when it is not necessary. The cost to the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services for a sitting of the Legislature averages \$1,335 per week. The cost of utilities alone, due to the House lighting and extended load on building services, averages \$105 per week, while the extra labour required averages \$1,230 per week.

Mr. Speaker, I agree that this money is well spent during the session when we are listening to the Provincial Treasurer deliver the Budget Address outlining the government's spending plans and then openly debating those plans during the budget estimates discussions. It is money well spent when members of this Assembly are debating necessary legislation that will improve the quality of life for Albertans or an issue that is in the public interest. I could not in good conscience go back to my constituents and explain that we will sit every fall, regardless of whether or not the government needs to pass legislation or it is in the public interest, simply because we are legislated to do so. I for one am not prepared to say this to my constituents.

Another issue, Mr. Speaker, is democracy. The Member for Edmonton-Glenora speaks of democracy and seems to believe that democracy only exists in this province when the Legislative

Assembly is sitting. I would argue that true democracy exists when we as elected representatives of the people of this province are out talking and listening to our constituents about their concerns and issues. The Legislature does not need to sit twice a year in order for democracy to be effective, contrary to what some members of this Assembly would have us believe.

Much of the work of a Member of the Legislative Assembly is done outside of session back in our respective constituencies. Being available to our constituents is our job. It is also one of the best ways to be openly and directly accountable to the electorate. Mr. Speaker, I know that some of my best discussions with constituents, when I get a real sense of the issues in my constituency, occur in the coffee shops or at community functions within my constituency. Attending these types of functions and going out and meeting with my constituents is what being a member of this Assembly is all about for me. The time spent one on one with constituents is invaluable. It ensures that when we are in the House voting and debating government policy and legislation, we are truly and accurately representing the views of the people we represent. This is the job that we were elected to do.

Mr. Speaker, legislating members to attend a session during the fall may in fact take away from the democratic process. This is because it reduces the number of days that we are in our constituencies with the people who elected us to represent them. What better way to hear constituents' concerns and issues than to speak directly with them. We can't do this when we are here in Edmonton. I am certain that all members of the Assembly are familiar with the term "dome disease." It occurs when we as elected officials lose touch with constituents, with their concerns and issues because too much time is being spent in Edmonton under the dome. To prevent this from happening, we must spend time in our constituencies. Democracy is well served by its elected representatives if they seek out the will of the people who elected them. For this reason, like my colleagues on this side of the House I try to spend as much time as possible in our constituencies, where we are accessible to the electorate.

Mr. Speaker, at no time has this government said that we would not sit during the fall or that we would not sit more than once within a 12-month period. What we have said, what we have committed to is sitting in the fall when it is in the public interest, when there is an urgent need, or when there is government legislation that needs to be debated. We are committed to doing this. We have done it in the past – in fact, just this past December to discuss national unity – and we will do it again, but only when it's necessary.

2:50

Mr. Speaker, a House agreement was drawn up for the sitting of the 23rd Legislature. This agreement ensured that there would be a spring and fall sitting in the Legislature each year. This House agreement was nullified with the March 1997 election and the convening of a new session. The new House leaders' agreement for the 24th Legislature does not require a fall sitting. This agreement was consented to by all three parties and signed in April of 1997. I find it somewhat peculiar that the Member for Edmonton-Glenora is choosing to bring this issue up now when the agreement has already been consented to.

Mr. Speaker, government is not about legislating for the sake of legislating. It is our responsibility to bring forth legislation when it is necessary to meet the needs of Albertans and to ensure the best standard of living for the people of this province. Quite frankly, I think that taxpayers in Alberta could think of better and

preferred ways to have their hard-earned tax dollars spent than to have us sitting here debating unnecessary legislation.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that this government has agreed to sitting in the fall when it is necessary, when it is in the public interest to do so. We are committed to doing this on the record. It is a waste of time and money if the only reason a session is held is because it is required by legislation rather than because the government needs legislation or there is an urgent matter to be addressed. We do not need legislation requiring us to sit unnecessarily, and for this reason I am not able to support Bill 211.

Thank you.

MS OLSEN: Mr. Speaker, democracy as defined by *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* is "government by all the people, direct or representative." I have some other interesting notes out of that particular definition: a "form of society ignoring hereditary class distinctions and tolerating minority views." So it is with pleasure that I rise to speak to this bill today, because I believe that in this Legislature is where true debate happens.

I have often spoken of the need for balanced legislation, and I believe that my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora should be thanked by all Albertans for addressing this need by bringing forward a balanced piece of legislation. You see, we have a government that doesn't see a need to have two sessions of the Legislature. The Minister of Justice stated not long ago, on March 31 as a matter of fact, that he wasn't going to support this legislation. He stated in his introductory remarks that "in 1886 a New York judge was heard to remark in his courtroom that no man's life, liberty, or property are safe while the Legislature is in session." Well, Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ with that, and I would venture to say that the victims of the sterilization fiasco beg to differ with that.

I would suggest that from this particular . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: It's too loud.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. At least I know I'm being heard.

This bill will not let us forget that debate on Bill 26, and the fact that we were here in this Legislature at that time prevented this bill from going ahead. The fact that the public rose up and spoke prevented the bill from going ahead. This Legislature is used as a vehicle for the public, and we're there to assist them. Be it government members or opposition members, our role is to assist the members of the public and our constituents, including my very own constituents, to bring their issues to the doors of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, when I decided to pursue political life, I told the voters in my constituency that I would represent their issues in the Legislature. The electorate believed I would indeed do just that, and now my constituents expect me to be here. By all accounts, by what we have seen during this legislative session, Bill 26 is only an example of why we should be here.

It is not acceptable to choose government by summit over debate in the Legislature, where all elected officials have an opportunity to participate, where all people are represented. You see, we've now had a Growth Summit. We're headed to a Justice Summit, and unfortunately our Justice Summit is being led by a lame duck Justice minister, a minister who doesn't believe in deliberative democracy. We have a VLT summit. Now we have a human rights summit; we have four people deciding what's going to happen on the Delwin Vriend decision.

So I might add that human rights should not be determined by political ideology or public opinion polls. Given this, I would propose to the Minister of Justice that if he and his colleagues are designing speeches "to fill some imaginable void," as he stated, "with our musings about issues which few have either the stamina or interest to reflect upon," then I respectfully submit that they have no business being in public life. I would argue that Albertans who pay the cabinet ministers' six-figure salaries and perks would expect their representatives to be in this House. They expect accountability, and whether the sponsor of Bill 26 and his colleagues believe it or not, this is where accountability does indeed happen.

Question period plays an important role in the process. I believe that part of my job is to be here and ask questions to the ministers on issues that affect the lives of Albertans on a daily basis. As an opposition member I believe my job is here, where we private members are able to introduce meaningful legislation and have meaningful debate. I just listened to the Member for Leduc across the way. He alluded to not bringing in unnecessary legislation. Well, I would suggest that if the government is bringing in unnecessary legislation to fill a void in here, then the government needs to be changed.

Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be in this Legislature over the spring break of my son. He's come to know what the role of an MLA should be, and I was very proud for him to be able to come and sit in the gallery while we were here. He got to watch question period and learn more about the role of the Legislature. I believe that that has to happen for more youths, for more kids, and I'm pleased to see that we make the opportunities for kids from different schools to come to the Legislature to see what this is all about. This is about lawmaking. This is where we do our job. This is part and parcel of democracy in this province and in this country. If that's not our job, what is our job?

I want to reflect a little bit on some of the issues that have arisen south of the border. I'm going to focus a little bit on California. California has a system whereby every time they go to vote, they have about 200 initiatives on the voter's agenda. It concerns me and it concerns many legislators in California, because no meaningful debate ever occurs over those particular initiatives. You either vote for them or you vote against them. They indeed have a library for lobbyists. They have set up a library where lobbyists can come in and get the help they need to bring forward bills and initiatives to put on the agenda for all voters to vote on. It bothers me that in a sense they've handcuffed themselves to some degree, because there is no debate. If an initiative is not a good initiative, the Legislature has to find a way around it. They spend more time finding their way around that kind of legislation. If they were able to bring those initiatives into the House to debate, then the good of those initiatives would become relevant, and if it was bad legislation or initiatives that weren't going to be for the greater good, that were not going to be for the betterment of the state, then there of course could be debate, and those particular initiatives could be voted down.

3:00

I'm a little concerned that we have a move by this particular government to do everything by summit and by popular vote and representation by telephone, those kinds of things. Serious lawmaking has to happen in this Legislature. If it doesn't, then we're not being responsible.

I would like to think about what our job should then really indeed be. I view it as having three components. I'm an elected representative for my constituency. I serve my constituency by

attending events, by going to the schools, by having meetings with different groups in the community, by bringing their issues to this Legislature. The second component of our job is to come to the Legislature, debate bills, bring the voice of the community here, and debate issues that are important to the public. The other aspect of that is to represent, in my case, the issues from my critic portfolio surrounding Justice and aboriginal affairs and social services.

That is a very, very, very heavy workload for any of us in here. Any one of those three components does not lessen the necessity for us to be here. What we hear when speaking to constituents, what we hear out around the province is what drives some of the initiatives that we bring in here. That's what hopefully drives some of the debate that flows from the government side.

This is a very important place, and it deserves the respect of all of us; yes, even the Minister of Labour. It does deserve our respect, and we should be here.

MR. SMITH: Well, why have you only got four people here, Sue? Only four people are here on your side.

MS OLSEN: Because I'm speaking right now. They'll come back.

DR. MASSEY: Ask him about the participation rate.

MS OLSEN: What about the participation rate? Through the Speaker, what about the participation rate in debate of the other side of the House? At least we're here to debate. We're active, we're involved, and we're participating.

Whether the government believes that we need to have one or two sessions of this Legislature is really something that all members on the other side should think about. I do not believe that we should dismiss this particular place. It has a place in lawmaking; it's the only place where laws can be made. It's the only place where we can debate issues that are of relevance to different laws. It's not the standing policy committees, because as opposition members we can't be there as active participants. If they were going to be democratic, they should be all-party committees so that we could debate some of the issues there. I'll take that smile from the hon. Minister of Labour, Mr. Speaker, as an indulgence of that, that he'd certainly push that issue forward.

The other issue I have is in relation to regulations that are made. Many of the pieces of legislation that we pass have a tremendous number of regulations that are adopted, but they don't go through the Law and Regulations Committee. I'm a member of that particular committee, and I feel there's a need, given that we're governing more by regulation, more by delegated authority, more by summit, that we should really be meeting. We should give the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane the opportunity to chair that meeting. She's the chairman of that particular standing committee, and I think that, in all fairness, she should get her opportunity to chair. All those pieces of legislation that come forward – and there are many that have been brought to the table in this session that are going to require regulations, and we need to be looking at those regulations. An all-party committee on those regulations would be just dandy, because then we could represent also the views of Albertans and constituents and the people we hear from.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe that we should have two sittings of

this Legislature. I believe it's necessary. I believe that to promote democracy, we should be engaged in debate and putting forward responsible pieces of legislation. I think that can happen. It doesn't have to happen in one sitting. It certainly can happen in two sittings of the Legislature. I would even go so far as to look at the particular agenda and the 40-odd pieces of legislation that have been tabled so far and the full debate that's not going to occur on those particular pieces because it appears that sometime in the next month the government wants to be out of the House. So now we have to put that off for another time. If we don't come back in September or October for a continuation of this session, then those bills and those pieces of legislation die on the Order Paper.

So my question then is: why did we bring them forward at all? I would suspect that the government wants to bring forward strong pieces of legislation, and I think that's important. So 41 pieces of legislation have been brought forward, and I would like the opportunity to debate those 41 pieces of legislation. Not only that; a number of private members' bills were brought forward. Only a small fraction of those will get debated, and private members are representing the views of their constituents.

The other aspect of that is that we also have a number of motions for returns and written questions, many of which we will never get to. We have many other motions brought forward by private members and government members that we'll never have the opportunity to debate, and I think they should be debated. If they were important enough to put on the Order Paper, they're certainly important enough to be debated.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I stand in support of two sessions of the Legislature in one year. I stand in support of this bill from my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora. I will take my leave and allow somebody else to address the issue.

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

MR. STEVENS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to add just a few comments on Bill 211, the Legislative Assembly Amendment Act, 1998. This amendment, as has already been pointed out, is meant to legislate the sitting of the House at least twice a year unless there is an eight-month marathon session or, in other words, at least 160 or more sitting days, in which case, in the view of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, the democratic process will be secure and the second sitting need not proceed.

The question of how often and how long the Legislature must sit is certainly not a new dilemma. Since the beginning of western civilization people have always begged the question: what is the role of government in a democracy? Mr. Speaker, that is not an easily defined, black and white answer, but there are certainly parameters that I believe we can all agree upon. First and foremost, the people of a western civilization have for centuries had representatives to bring forward their views. Over that time this tradition of representation has seen a great deal of change and all for the better. History has taught us a great deal in understanding political philosophy and the structure of our parliamentary system. That history has taught us what works and what doesn't work and why. But one thing about the political playing field and the legislative procedure is that it is not stagnant. Sir Winston Churchill in May 1926 stated:

In this Country we avow our faith in Parliamentary government – we are unshaken by certain developments of the modern world. All wisdom is not new wisdom, and we rest with confidence on the institutions created by the wisdom of our ancestors. We are not blind to the defects of the Parliamentary system, but we are

still convinced that if properly worked and properly understood, it is the most flexible and practical form of the government of men that has yet been discovered.

I imagine that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora would agree that there will never be a time in our future when the legislative process is so predictable that we can set our agenda to deal with matters before they arise.

3:10

Mr. Speaker, this government is being very responsible in its dealings with issues. By law and by convention we as a Legislature must meet at least once a year every year during our five-year mandate. This government has a stated commitment to all Albertans that we will meet twice a year when there is a need. In fact, we have already exercised that judgment and lived up to that commitment during this 24th Legislature. We met in December of last year to discuss the unity issue, an issue of national magnitude.

Mr. Speaker, we will not sit twice a year if there is no need. As an Assembly we have an obligation to meet once a year. We have legislated that in an Alberta statute. The Legislative Assembly Act states that we cannot let 12 months pass between the end of a session and the beginning of a new session.

As a member of the British Commonwealth, Alberta's entire political process and parliamentary procedures are steeped in the English tradition. From the time feudal lords ruled the land to the beginning of the building of their Parliament buildings in 1097, we have seen our lives shaped by our political and parliamentary system. One of the first recorded acts of representation and the use of advisers in England's parliamentary system occurred in 1254 when the king sent for his knights of the shires to come to London to advise him on his finances. By 1295 a model Parliament had been created and summoned by Edward I. This model Parliament, which is regarded as the first representative assembly in England, included two knights from each county, two burgesses from each borough, and two citizens from each city. Mr. Speaker, by necessity Rome had established the need for representation, and by precedence Great Britain had adopted that need, a need for tradition and a need for representation that continues in its modified form today.

However, once the model Parliament had been assembled and had become the normal flow of political workings, the Parliament still did not just sit in London. As late as 1681 the Parliament was still meeting in Oxford, and the sitting of the Parliament was still at the whim of the king. There were no set dates or set numbers of sittings. That came a few years later. In 1694 the Triennial Act was passed in the Commons, dictating that there must be at least one meeting of Parliament every three years and also limiting the lifespan of Parliament to three years. Mr. Speaker, the time limits set out by the Triennial Act survived until 1716, when the Septennial Act was passed. This act extended the life of the Parliament to seven years from its original three. Although this brought stability to the 18th century political system, it also brought with it corruption and electoral manipulation. This act was eventually replaced in 1911 by the Parliament Act, the act which was the driving force behind our own Constitution. This act reduced the duration of a Parliament to only five years.

Canada, as we all know, has adopted this rule. All legislative assemblies, including the House of Commons, must be dissolved within five years after every election. The Constitution Act of 1867 also dictated how often the House of Commons must meet. It read as follows:

There shall be a Session of the Parliament of Canada once at least in every Year, so that Twelve Months shall not intervene between the last Sitting of the Parliament in one Session and its first Sitting in the next Session.

When the Constitution Act was revised in 1982, that section was amended to read as follows: "There shall be a sitting of Parliament and of each legislature at least once every twelve months." As the hon. members know, we are ruled by that law. We must – and I stress "must" – under federal law meet at least once a year. We agree with that, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we have adopted that section of the Charter into our own Legislative Assembly Act, which the hon. member now wishes to amend.

Over the long history of parliamentary government, the Legislature and its debates have become quite elaborate and ceremonial, but one thing has stayed the same: the need for the House to sit and to bring forward strong new legislation and to allow the elected officials the ability to voice the concerns of their constituents. Mr. Speaker, I agree that this is the mandate of the Legislature. This government does bring forward strong legislation, and creating strong legislation takes time. We are also here to voice the concerns of our constituents, a voice given to us in the last election, but we cannot voice those concerns if we have no idea what they are. When this House is not in session, I for one do not go back to my constituency and say to myself: well, my work is done for the year. Certainly I know I can speak for all of my government colleagues in saying that.

No, Mr. Speaker. Much of my most important work is really just beginning. Unlike most of the opposition, I don't live here in Edmonton. Therefore, during session I must travel to and from my constituency weekly. This means that I cannot meet with constituents every day during session. As a representative of my constituents, I try at every opportunity to get out and meet with them. That is my job. My job is to listen and to be there for my constituents. This government, this Legislature, does not need a rule that requires it to be in session twice a year for me to do my job to the best of my ability.

As Sir Winston Churchill said, again in 1926:

There is another function of Parliament which, if successfully discharged, will in every country preserve the power of the representative institutions. Parliament, properly viewed and properly guided, is the greatest instrument of associating . . . citizens with actual life and policy of the State.

Mr. Speaker, when I leave this building, I escape the risk of dome disease. I look forward to getting back to my constituency so I can take what we have done here directly to the people who elected me to do just that, to keep them informed as to what the government is doing and to bring their concerns back with me to this House.

I do not believe that what this bill sets out will address what is intended. The hon. member feels the House must be in session for democracy to take place, for this government to be accountable. Mr. Speaker, that is a somewhat narrow view of democracy and of representation. Just as I and my caucus colleagues do, I am certain the hon. member and his colleagues write letters to various ministers asking for assistance or guidance in dealing with constituent concerns. I do not believe that when we are not in this building, the hon. member stops writing those letters or stops asking those questions. That is something I just do not believe happens. The hon. member is a very intuitive and indeed action-oriented member, so I for one do not think he believes his work is done when this House is not in session or that he cannot fulfill his role as the opposition when we are not sitting.

Bill 211 is unnecessary. I believe this government should sit

as often as is necessary, but legislating the times is not necessary when there is a commitment by this government to sit if there is a need. That need should be a matter of judgment, Mr. Speaker, not a matter of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe history and tradition play a great part in our lives. I would like to finish with a quote, again from Sir Winston Churchill.

We wish to see our Parliament a strong, easy, flexible instrument of free Debate. It is notable that the Parliaments of the British Commonwealth have to a very large extent reproduced our Parliamentary institutions in their form as well as in their spirit.

We do not need this legislation dictating when we will sit in this Assembly, but what is needed is a commitment that the House will sit when needed. Mr. Speaker, we have that commitment, and for that reason I will be voting against Bill 211.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, like the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, represent a Calgary constituency. I also experience the frustration when session is going on at not being immediately available to the 36,000-odd people in downtown Calgary I represent. It is difficult to spend enough time on the phone speaking to people. You can't get to all the meetings in your constituency or in your community.

But, Mr. Speaker, with respect, that member must have some pages missing from his calendar. There are 12 months in a year. If the Legislature were to sit as it used to when we had two sessions, for about three months in the spring and a month and a half in the fall, that still leaves, Mr. Speaker, something in the order of seven months for MLAs to be able to get out and speak to their constituents.

3:20

When the Member for Calgary-Glenmore talks about wanting to avoid dome disease, I can't help but think of the city of Calgary when public schoolteachers last fall were working a work-to-rule campaign and the concern that that caused on the part of Calgary families. That's, I think, the largest public school division or public school district in the dominion, and when you've got something as serious as a work-to-rule campaign, those Calgarians expect that their elected legislators are attempting to hold the Minister of Education to account. Now, if the Member for Calgary-Glenmore thinks there's no difference between my sitting in my Calgary-Buffalo office in downtown Calgary firing letters or phone messages to the Minister of Education and being able to come into this formal place and in a public way with a written record be able to challenge the Minister of Education, then his experience in this place has been vastly different from mine.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at what's been said by members opposite, we started off with the Minister of Justice saying that politicians "consume time." He wanted "to avoid prolonging the agony" of that minister in having to sit in the Assembly. Well, you know, it's been no fun in this session for the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, but in terms of some of the things that we've seen go on in that portfolio, one has to ask: how would that minister properly be held to account if it wasn't in this place?

The Minister of Justice made a point, in fact reflected again by the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, when he said that being in here, "it isolates us from what really matters to our electors." Well, Mr. Speaker, I go back to that crisis or that problem in Calgary public education last fall. Maybe the Member for Calgary-Glenmore wasn't getting phone calls, and maybe the

other Conservative MLAs from the city of Calgary weren't getting calls. That was a huge issue in my part of the city of Calgary. People had a lot of concern. They had a lot of questions for the Minister of Education. Rather than isolating us from what really matters, this simply provides us with a forum to do what those people expect, which is to ask questions.

The Minister of Justice said, "Legislative sittings do not equate to accountability." Well, of course they do not. The other part is missing. It's not good enough simply to be able to ask the questions. You need meaningful, focused responses from ministers of the Crown to get genuine accountability, something that we don't always see in this Assembly.

The Member for Leduc said that the Legislature is intended for government legislation or urgent issues in the public interest. Well, the reality is, Member for Leduc, through the Speaker: who decides what's an urgent issue? If people in downtown Calgary last fall thought public education was an urgent issue, it was clear the Minister of Education didn't think so. It was clear the Premier and the Government House Leader didn't think so, because they weren't prepared to call back . . .

MRS. LAING: Come on, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, the Member for Calgary-Bow, of all people in this Assembly, knows the importance of that education issue in the fall of 1997, and I suspect there were some constituents in Calgary-Bow who expected that that member, who's always working hard to give voice to her constituents, would also be asking those questions, not just in secret caucus meetings but in this place, where there's a record and where the minister has to accountable in a public way.

The Member for Leduc said that to hold a session because it's legislated would be, quote, irresponsible and not cost-effective, close quote. Well, when one looks at the \$15 billion that this Legislature debates briefly every spring and you look at the enormous impact of the decisions that we make, whether it's in health care or education or justice, this is the forum where we should be talking about those things. And to the members who suggest that debate is irresponsible, I can only say that that Member for Leduc and the Member for Calgary-Glenmore, with his excellent history of early parliamentary traditions, have to sit down and talk, because there's an enormous gulf between the two points of view.

The Member for Leduc went on to say: the government has agreed to a more responsible approach; we are committed to holding a fall session when it is necessary. Then he went on to say: if there's pressing government legislation which needs to be addressed, we will hold a fall session. He's completing ignoring the other equally important role of a legislator, to press ministers of the government and attempt to hold them accountable, not just to pass laws.

You know, there was an excellent analysis that was done on the role of question period that I want to refer members to, done by a John McDonough in July of 1985, prepared for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. He identified some of the values and some of the attributes of question period. I just wanted to touch on them briefly.

- (a) It presents a lively spectacle promoting public interest in Parliament and parliamentary affairs.

Now, I understand why ministers of the Crown would not see that as being a meritorious argument for question period and for two sessions a year, but I think Albertans would see the advantage to it. Secondly:

- (b) It provides a specific period of time each day in which a large number of miscellaneous issues may be dealt with quickly within a parliamentary framework.

It does indeed do that.

- (c) It permits the illumination of political events not otherwise on the parliamentary agenda.

Well, that's a very important advantage that flows from question period.

- (d) It permits the detailed supervision of selected aspects of administration policy, the public service, and the conduct of ministers, both individually and collectively.

Mr. Speaker, I can't help but think of the number of times we've seen the Minister of Family and Social Services held to account, pressing to find out what's happened to Alberta children in the care of the province. I defy any member of this Assembly to suggest a more effective forum for members to be able to hold that minister accountable on something as important as what happens to Alberta children in care. You don't have the same productivity and you don't have the same impact simply writing letters to the Minister of Family and Social Services or making a quiet phone call or running into that minister in an airport waiting area and having a word with him. It isn't the same thing.

I understand why the Legislature is no fun for government members. There is, at least in my observation, the unwritten rule to basically not embarrass the government, not challenge the government in a public way.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Come on. We like it here.

MR. DICKSON: I mean, I understand why it's not a lot of fun maybe for the Member for St. Albert or for the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services or for any other member to be in this Assembly. I understand the frustration, but you know, those members have other opportunities outside this House to be able to get the attention of a minister. They have other forums and secret standing policy committees paid for by taxpayers but to which Albertans have no access other than a little brief hearing period.

I understand their frustration with the process of the Assembly. I understand the frustration of ministers of the Crown with question period, but those are the most compelling . . .

MR. WOLOSHYN: Speak for yourself. The frustration is only over there.

MR. DICKSON: Only when it comes to getting law and regulations adequately reviewed, Mr. Speaker. That's the only frustration. Otherwise, this continues to be the best job in the province.

In any event, Mr. Speaker, I was trying to enumerate what I thought were pretty strong reasons which were outlined in the analysis done by Mr. McDonough in terms of the role of question period and why the Assembly is important. One of the other reasons I didn't mention is that "questions may be arranged by the government itself."

I think we've run out of time, so I'll take this up tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but the time limit for consideration of this matter today has now expired.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

3:30 Unwanted Pregnancies

510. Mr. Marz moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the

government to work in partnership with the federal government and the College of Physicians and Surgeons to review federal and provincial strategies that address unwanted pregnancies and the related issues of teen pregnancies, abortions, and the waiting lists for adoptions and examine the factors contributing to and means of improving upon the outcomes of these strategies.

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to bring Motion 510 forward today for debate. It is important that the factors contributing to unwanted pregnancies be examined and that we look for ways to improve upon strategies that target them. The issues relating to unwanted pregnancies have been of great concern to the people of my constituency for a long period of time, and to finally have the opportunity to address them is quite gratifying for both myself and my constituents.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Madam Speaker, we have a problem with unwanted pregnancies in this country and in this province. While our rates of unintended pregnancies, including teen pregnancy, are lower in Alberta than some of the other provinces, they are nonetheless quite high, indeed ranking amongst the highest, and are in need of being addressed. Likewise, I believe the rate of abortion is also in need of some study. I would like to share with the members of this House some of the information I encountered while researching this motion.

Madam Speaker, it is estimated that as many as 30 to 50 percent of pregnancies are unplanned. This number reaches about 85 percent in the case of teen pregnancy. Now, these are American statistics, but Canadian figures are quite likely to be comparable. Unplanned pregnancies, including those that are mistimed and those that are unwanted - and to find a good indication of the number of unwanted pregnancies in Alberta, we can look at the number of abortions and adoptions that occur each year in the province as well as the rates of teen pregnancy.

Madam Speaker, Alberta has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in Canada. There are 38 pregnancies for every 1,000 girls aged 15 to 19 compared to the national average of 27 per 1,000 girls, an average which I believe is far too high. This amounted to 4,971 pregnancies in Alberta in 1995-96 to girls under the age of 19. The Department of Education has acknowledged the seriousness of this problem and has set a target to reduce Alberta's rate to a number equal to or below the Canadian average by 2005. I commend the department for taking this initiative, and I express my wish that when that target is reached, a new target is set to reduce the teen pregnancy rate even further.

The high pregnancy rate for adolescent girls has resulted in correspondingly high abortion rates. In 1995-96 there were 1,998 abortions on girls under the age of 19. In other words, about 40 percent of the total pregnancies for this age group resulted in abortion. In fact, Madam Speaker, the abortion rate overall has increased steadily since the mid-1980s. Although the numbers have fluctuated up and down somewhat from year to year, in the 1985-86 fiscal year the total number of abortions performed in Alberta was 6,356. Eleven years later that number sits at 9,608. This happened despite a slight decrease in the total number of estimated pregnancies in the province over that same period of time.

At the same time, there are many couples in this province

unable to conceive children on their own who are faced with waiting lists of up to seven years to adopt a child. It is important to ask, I believe, why abortions of teenage mothers are being chosen in preference to giving a child up for adoption.

Now, I'd like to make it clear to the members of this Assembly that I'm not proposing the recriminalization of abortion. I do acknowledge, however, that high abortion rates are not a desirable thing for our society or for the women who undergo the procedure. Even looked at as a purely medical procedure, it makes sense to bring this number down as low as we can, as all medical procedures necessarily involve risk to the patient. There are consequences to abortion, Madam Speaker, of physical, emotional, and psychological natures. Motion 510 is an attempt to approach these issues in a proactive rather than a reactive way. It is my belief that the best way to address the rate of abortions is to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, and the best way to reduce unwanted pregnancies is to have effective and accountable strategies in place to reduce risk factors.

Madam Speaker, we have so much data and many likely causes but very few answers when examining these issues. Over the last three decades there has been a substantial increase in support and educational services, but this has not resulted in a corresponding decrease in need. Instead, the numbers have continued to rise over time. It is necessary to examine all the possible causes and relevant factors in order to figure out what does and what does not work effectively. This is the motivation behind Motion 510.

Among the causes suggested for high rates of unwanted pregnancies are the poor use of contraceptives, a lack of consequences for the men and boys who help create these pregnancies, and a media environment that addresses sexuality without also addressing the choices and the responsibility that go along with sexual behaviour.

The combination of social and biological factors has also been cited as contributing to this problem. Young people are experiencing puberty at an earlier age but marrying at a much later age than in past years, leading to a greater number of sexual partners before marriage. In the cases of teen pregnancy specifically, sexual abuse of girls is believed to have a substantial effect on the likelihood of an early pregnancy. Madam Speaker, approximately 50 to 75 percent of the girls who become pregnant before the age of 18 have been sexually abused at some point in their lives. Sexual exploitation of teenage girls by men who are much older is also common.

I am happy to note that this government through Bill 1, the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act, has recently taken steps to protect young people from exploitation. As the members of this Assembly know, part of the bill dealt with the prevention and early intervention stages to help children at risk. In particular, I would like to commend the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek and the Minister of Family and Social Services as well as the Premier for their determination in bringing this bill through the House.

I was surprised to learn through researching this motion that not all adolescent pregnancies are unwanted. Madam Speaker, we tend to assume that all teenage pregnancies are unplanned and unwanted, but this is not the case. There are young women choosing early motherhood. Many of them make this choice as a way to escape an abusive family situation, establish independence, seek validation, or to have someone to love and love them back unconditionally. We must look for ways to address the needs of these young women as well.

Sex education in schools is also another important consideration

when looking at the incidence of unwanted pregnancies. It is used as one of the main tools of prevention for our young people. In light of this we need to ask: is it really helping? Do we have any way to measure the effectiveness of various programs in preventing teen pregnancies and other problems? What is the best approach in tackling this subject with young people? Some argue that education about sex is best left to parents; others believe that the school system has a role to play. But what do we teach our young people? Do we teach them about the clinical, scientific facts only, or do we base our teachings within a moral framework? Do we teach abstinence or birth control or a little bit of both? Which of these options leaves young people in the best position to make smart decisions so that they do not find themselves with an unwanted pregnancy.

Madam Speaker, there are definite consequences for the mother, the child, and the taxpayer when an early or unwanted pregnancy occurs. Alberta Health notes that unintended pregnancies are often associated with poor health in both the mother and her child. Quite often poverty, lack of education, poor family supports, and lack of prenatal care also play a role, and sometimes poverty and a lack of education are the result of an early, unwanted pregnancy. For adolescents difficulties such as inadequate weight gain during pregnancy, hypertension, and anemia may result. Single adolescent mothers are more likely to discontinue their education than other young women. They're also more likely than their peers to live in poverty and to depend on social assistance. The children of these young girls are then apt to inherit this legacy of poverty and social disadvantage. Low birth weight in infants is common, which can result in greater risk of death, illness, and lifelong chronic health problems for the child. These children are at risk for developmental or emotional difficulties.

There are also consequences associated with choosing abortion, Madam Speaker. Many women cite feelings of desperation, remorse, anxiety, or guilt due to the termination of pregnancy. This is particularly true when a woman has felt pressured by a boyfriend, husband, or family member, by her personal financial situation, or if she is an adolescent. In many cases these emotions can lead to depression or self-destructive behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse. The side effects can also be physical, affecting, for example, a woman's future fertility.

3:40

Finally, Madam Speaker, there are consequences for the greater society. Unwanted pregnancies result in higher costs to the welfare system, the health care system, and the education system. I mentioned the disruption in education and employment and the health consequences that can result from unintended teenage pregnancies especially. Poor health in the mother means that costs to the health care system will be higher for both herself and her child, quite often on a long-term basis.

So what can be done? Madam Speaker, I believe that we need to thoroughly examine the factors contributing to these issues. I have mentioned some possible factors here today, but to what degree each of these suggested factors has played a role is still largely a matter of opinion. A good amount of research has been done in the United States to address the same sorts of issues that Motion 510 speaks about by organizations such as the Alan Guttmacher Institute in New York and by the Washington-based National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Several states, such as Kentucky, have also set up task forces and committees to study this problem.

In Canada, Madam Speaker, the province of Manitoba has been

studying the problem of adolescent pregnancies through the Children and Youth Secretariat. The secretariat is an interdepartmental body, with members from justice, education, health, and social services participating. What they are studying is somewhat different in subject because they are looking at deliberate or unplanned teen pregnancy specifically and what the consequences of this phenomenon are for the young women and their children in the social welfare system. Once the causes are known, of course solutions can become easier to identify.

This is essentially the basis of Motion 510, Madam Speaker, looking at the causes and the possible solutions. I don't claim to have a magic or quick-fix solution to these issues, but I believe it is important that a dialogue be initiated, that as a province we begin to examine these issues, and that we are courageous enough to look for answers. It is also essential that any solutions we propose are subject to standards and accountability measures in order that the programs that receive funding are the programs that really work, from sex education to early intervention programs. Despite the number of programs in place and the resources that are used every year, the number of unwanted pregnancies and abortions is increasing. A result of the initiatives that are in place and proposals for those that could be may serve to identify areas of success that can be strengthened and areas in which improvements or changes are warranted in order to reverse this trend.

As I mentioned earlier, teen pregnancies often go hand in hand with poverty and low levels of education and only serve to perpetuate this cycle. Addressing the underlying causes of teen pregnancy, then, may not only help to reduce the total number of teen pregnancies but may help to break this cycle for both the mother and the child.

If we are able to find some solutions, Madam Speaker, think of all the wonderful improvements to Alberta's quality of life that could be made. We will have improved the lives of many young women, reduced the number of children who come into this world unwanted, and eased the burden on the health care system and the social services system.

Motion 510 offers an opportunity to move beyond the polarization that often results when addressing these important issues so that we can do what's best for the people of Alberta.

I urge the members of this Assembly to support this motion. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. Firstly in addressing the motion, I'm curious why the mover of the motion didn't offer an explanation in terms of why the motion has been amended to significantly change it. Initially we were looking to review federal and provincial legislation and "policies" concerning abortion and contributing factors to abortion. Now it's been substantially, indeed dramatically revised. Now we're looking at federal and provincial "strategies." If the member offered an explanation for the change, I didn't hear it. Perhaps one of his colleagues will have a chance to offer that explanation.

The reason why that's significant is that I'm trying to understand the concern and the focus of the mover of the motion. If it is simply one of addressing the statistically established fact that we have an increasing national rate of pregnancy, no one would take issue with that. If it's a question of looking at strategies simply to attempt to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, unplanned pregnancies, well, I think that's something that's

clearly worthy of support. I think there is always a suspicion, however, that there may be some other motivation. Given the initial wording of the motion, I think many of us are a bit apprehensive in terms of viewing this and looking at it in a bigger context.

What is abundantly clear is that not only do we have a rising unplanned pregnancy rate, but there's no single way of resolving that. It isn't simply going to be better school education programs, as important as that is. It's not simply more families taking time to discuss family planning issues with their children, as important as that is. Both of those things have to be done, and there are large, important roles both for families as well as for our public education system. Clearly, we do have a lack of information. Poor use of contraceptives, inadequate use of contraceptives has been noted, and a media environment where sex is used as a marketing tool. Absolutely that's part of the context, part of the kind of challenge we deal with. But to members that are concerned about a high rate of unwanted pregnancies, there are some specific things, some very concrete things we can do here as provincial legislators.

What I wanted to do is spend a couple of minutes talking about some of those concrete things that we can do. I've been a bit dismayed when I've seen funding cuts. Whether it's the Edmonton Planned Parenthood Association, whether it's the Calgary Birth Control Association, these are groups that are doing the very thing that has to be done and done to a far greater extent. There are agencies like that right around this province that are providing objective, unbiased, factual information to young people, to parents, to people who work with young people. I think that's important to any member who thinks it's important to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. It means that we've got to be able to provide some support in ways that are meaningful to agencies which provide that kind of educational program and those kinds of supports.

I see the Minister of Health is present for the debate, and that's instructive because I wanted to remind him of a very important report that was done in July of 1996 by the Calgary regional health authority. The Calgary regional health authority said: we want to address issues in terms of unwanted, unplanned pregnancies because it's a significant challenge in region 4, in the Calgary region. They put together a report that was produced in July of 1996. They had a working group, and it had representation from Calgary Health Services, from the Kensington clinic, from the Calgary regional health authority, from the Calgary Birth Control Association, from people at the Peter Lougheed centre, from consumers. That committee came up with a report, and I tabled it earlier. I'm not sure whether the mover of the motion has seen the report, but I tabled it because I wanted members to be able to access it preparatory to this debate we're in now.

One of the things that is most frustrating to me is that when I had a chance to meet with representatives of this working group just within the last couple of weeks, they talked about how much effort went into trying to identify resources in the Calgary region and agencies providing important services around pregnancy and unwanted, unplanned pregnancies. They came up with some very specific kinds of recommendations and suggestions. The frustration is that these groups, who came and worked with the Calgary regional health authority and worked with Alberta Health to address the very things that are referred to in the motion, find that the recommendations haven't been followed. So one has to ask just where the difficulty is. These are things – before we worry about telling the House of Commons and Members of Parliament

how they should do things differently, have we done everything we can to address this problem in Alberta?

3:50

I can give you an example, Madam Speaker. For those women who choose to have an abortion, there's a very big access problem throughout southern Alberta. Most women in southern Alberta who want access to an abortion have to come to Calgary for that purpose, and there are only the three facilities in Calgary where they can get this service: the Kensington clinic in downtown Calgary, the gynecology clinic at Peter Lougheed centre, the northwest clinic at Foothills hospital.

What's apparent when you look at the 1996 report of the working group I referred to a moment ago is that the recommendations that they had made to the region and to Alberta Health simply haven't been followed. What's happening are some serious delays. The report recognized that there should be a limited waiting list for procedures which shouldn't exceed one week, but in fact what we're finding is that the waiting list at Kensington clinic is two to three weeks, and that's a constant, Madam Speaker. The hospital waiting list is frequently at two weeks and for several weeks this past winter, '97-98, extended to three weeks. As a result, what's happening is that women in the city of Calgary or Lethbridge or Medicine Hat, throughout southern Alberta, are finding that they can't get access to abortion in Calgary. They have to travel to the Capital region, because for a variety of reasons you can have better access in this region than you can in the city of Calgary.

That sort of thing creates a big problem, because for those women that have very modest means or no means, it means additional expense. For women that aren't able to access abortions in the city of Calgary, it means that there are additional delays. Additional delays mean more complications, a substantially greater risk to the women involved, and I don't think those are acceptable kinds of things in a province like Alberta.

Somebody had said earlier that abortion is a desirable thing. I don't think any legislator would see abortion to be a desirable procedure, but I expect members in this Assembly to recognize that when women make that decision, I think never an easy decision to make and not, as so frequently suggested, as a means of birth control, the responsibility of the province of Alberta is to be able to provide accessible services and ensure that there aren't distance, time, and cost impediments that prevent those women from being able to access abortion services.

So what we've got in Alberta right now is unequal access. We have differences. If you're a woman living in the south half of the province, you've got frankly not the same kind of equal access to an abortion service that perhaps a woman living in Edmonton or in the Edmonton region would have. For those of us who think that in this province there should be a provincewide standard of accessibility, that doesn't exist right now. I'm hopeful the Minister of Health is going to engage in this debate, because we have with us in this Assembly the minister who has the power and the legislative mandate to be able to address those kinds of inequities, those kinds of access problems wherever they exist.

Now, I know that I have colleagues who are anxious to join the debate as well.

I sent a letter to the Minister of Health raising this same issue. It may not have come to his attention yet, but I'm going to take advantage of this opportunity to alert him to that access problem which exists in the province, particularly in southern Alberta, to encourage him to address it and also to take the time to go through the July 1996 report from the maternal-newborn regional

program in the Calgary regional health authority, go through and look at the very concrete recommendations that are made there.

To those members from Calgary and region I suggest that you might want to volunteer with the Calgary Birth Control Association. Spend a couple of hours on the phone, perhaps provide some assistance in terms of working with organizations like that, who are addressing in very concrete and immediate and supportive ways women who need information to be able to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health. So that's something that deserves our support.

One of my colleagues I know is going to address some of the challenges in the Capital region, but I want to say that Calgary Health Services, the Family Planning Clinic, needs to be adequately resourced to be able to meet the needs they have. There have been suggestions made that the Calgary regional health authority should consider placing a full-page advertisement in the applicable AGT yellow pages in southern Alberta, Red Deer and south, which will provide accurate information about accessing abortions, including how to access counseling services to all women, including those outside the region. One has only to see the kind of war that goes on in the yellow pages of a telephone directory to see that women, in many cases young women, at perhaps one of the most vulnerable times in their lives, when they're looking for objective information, end up getting caught up in a bit of a maelstrom of competition between competing ideologies or values. That's not fair to those women, Madam Speaker. It's not fair at all. We've got to be able to do much better in terms of ensuring those kinds of services are provided.

I can give you an example. In Calgary, if you look at the telephone directory, there are listed in the white pages eight different listings for antichoice groups. It's all the same phone number, but it's a host of different agencies. One can't stop, in a free market system, people advertising any way they want, but the Calgary regional health authority, Alberta Health have the opportunity to address that because of their resources. I'd want to encourage the minister to do that. I think that women in this province have to have access to accurate, nonjudgmental, biopsychosocial counseling services. They have to be able to access that through their physicians' offices, through agencies like the Family Planning Clinic and birth control associations in those communities. Counseling services have got to be tailored to the women's individual needs. I could go on, but I think I've identified some of the things that I think are particularly important.

I'd just conclude by saying that until we have done everything we can to ensure that in our education programs, in our education curriculum, until we've done everything we can through our regional health authorities and through Alberta Health and through our public health services in terms of providing that kind of information to young people, we're not going to be particularly credible when we show up trying to talk to national media agencies, national corporations. We're not going to be very credible in going to the Parliament of Canada and suggesting changes that they should make. In my respectful submission that's a challenge for us as provincial legislators.

Thanks very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

4:00

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak to Motion 510. I believe that in attempting to address unwanted and teenage pregnancies, this

motion has the potential to improve the lives of many young women in this province.

I would like to share a story today with the members of this Assembly which I believe speaks to the importance of this motion. Picture a young girl, pretty and strong willed, who against all caution dates a possessive, rebellious boy with long greasy hair and a bad reputation. Within three months she finds herself pregnant, much to her family's dismay. When her pregnancy begins to show, she is moved to her sister's house in another city, away from the critics and the curious, where she can attend a school for unwed mothers. She knows she is unable to care for the baby on her own and decides to give it up for adoption. It is a lonely birth, for only one sister attends. She names the sweet, dark-eyed wee girl Allison and emotionally signs the adoption papers.

Returning home with the intention to get on with her life, she finds it is not that easy. She finds she cannot erase the memory of her child, and upon finding her still in foster care after three months, she decides to apply for adoption. Tragically, as the papers are being processed, the wee baby dies of SIDS, and the young girl's entire family mourns with her. The young girl carries on with her life, eventually marrying and raising two children, but she is frequently haunted by thoughts of the child she lost so long ago.

Madam Speaker, I know this sad story well, because the young girl I speak of is my younger sister.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, the issues of unwanted and teen pregnancies have touched me quite closely and deeply. They can affect not only the mother and the child but also spouses, parents, and other family members in a very real way. I believe it is important, then, that there are not only effective strategies in place to prevent these situations but that effective strategies and programs also exist to assist young women who find themselves in a difficult situation.

A tremendous number of young girls, in fact almost 5,000, find themselves pregnant every year in Alberta. Some of these girls are as young as 12, Madam Speaker. In 1995-96 there were almost 3,000 births to young women under the age of 19. Just imagine; there are that many girls becoming mothers at such a young age.

To complicate matters, very few of these young women choose to give their children up for adoption. These young women, if they choose to keep their babies, will have a harder time completing school than their peers. They may have difficulties getting a job, especially a well-paying job, and are more likely to depend on social assistance. Their children will experience the consequences of poverty and low education and in addition may suffer health or developmental problems as they grow up. If they choose to give the child up for adoption or have an abortion, there are often attendant feelings of remorse and guilt, which can affect a young woman for years.

Madam Speaker, there are several valuable programs, I feel, across this province which aim to assist young mothers and provide guidance to others so they do not find themselves pregnant before they are ready. One such program is that offered by Ernest Manning high school in Calgary. There is a similar program offered in Edmonton through the Terra Association and Braemar school. Through both programs teenage mothers have the opportunity to continue their high school education in a supportive environment where their children are cared for during class time. The program recognizes and makes every effort to respond to the unique needs of teenage parents. According to Jim

Stevenson, principal of Ernest Manning high school, the visibility of teen moms and their small children in the school facility surely works as a form of birth control with other students.

I would certainly like to commend Calgary Health Services, the Catholic Family Service, and the staff at Ernest Manning high school for the valuable work that they do as well as the staff and volunteers at Terra and Braemar school.

Madam Speaker, there are several early intervention programs offered throughout the province which aim to provide teen parents with the skills to become good parents and make the most of their own potential. Many programs also aim to prevent subsequent pregnancies of young women who have already had one child, and that certainly is the case.

Like the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I, too, am interested in finding solutions. We need to improve upon programs that work and enhance the co-ordination and co-operation of the various departments who are involved to some degree with these issues. We need to examine such considerations as the availability of birth control and the content of the sex education curriculum in schools.

The sex education programs put together by Alberta Education are designed to provide young people with a solid foundation on issues relating to sexuality and to foster responsible decision-making. These courses touch on a broad range of issues, among them abstinence, contraception, external influences and peer pressure, and the consequences of all choices. Alternatives to unplanned pregnancies are discussed in later grades, including marriage, adoption, abortion, and single or shared parenting.

These discussions help young people realize, at least I hope help them realize, that there are potential consequences to being sexually active and better enable them to make smarter decisions. It is important however, I think, that curriculum content is reviewed regularly and that we are aware of which programs are and are not effective.

While I don't have the answers, Madam Speaker, I think we would do well to certainly look for them. We have statistics indicating the prevalence of teen pregnancies in Alberta and evidence demonstrating the consequences, consequences which, as the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills pointed out, exist for the mother, the child, and the greater society.

I would be encouraged to see the establishment of partnerships and dialogue among stakeholders in Alberta to tackle the issues which Motion 510 raises so that all sides of the equation can be examined in a more holistic fashion.

Madam Speaker, I believe that it is only by understanding the problem and identifying real solutions that we can truly tackle the problem of unwanted pregnancies and the related issues that follow from it. As such, I would urge the members of this Assembly to support the motion.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak on Motion 510. This is an interesting and I guess we could say historic dilemma that continues to face our society when we talk about unwanted pregnancies. I'm particularly concerned about teen pregnancies and our success or failure as a society and I suppose as legislators in that area. We don't seem to be able to find a successful program there. I'm also wondering if we haven't put our heart and soul and commitment into the programs

that do exist to a point where they could be effective. I'm not convinced that we've exhausted the possibilities of the programs that are available to young people at this point in time.

I think sometimes we chicken out and are uneasy or squeamish about programs for younger people and soft-pedal it a bit. When we do that, the young people are not able to take the full benefit of the program. It's definitely a dilemma for us. As has already been discussed and raised here, this affects our community health system. It affects schools, education, and there's a lot of other issues mixed in with it.

I'd like to talk awhile about the social costs of teen pregnancies and maybe some ideas about where we could be going with that and some of the strategies that we could continue to use and maybe look at integrating some new ones. I've been encouraged to hear some of my colleagues talking about an understanding that poverty is indeed behind many of the teen pregnancies. I just want to clarify here. I hope that no one here is repeating the urban myth that young women get pregnant so they can get on social assistance. I think that's absolute bosh. I can't imagine why anybody would put themselves into a physical and health situation so they could qualify for a few hundred dollars a month. I truly believe that's one of the great urban myths of our time. But poverty is certainly a factor that affects teens in this day and age.

4:10

How do we make it a more supportive environment? Well, if we've got a teenager deciding to parent a child, it's definitely more successful if we have a supportive extended family and if we have supportive friends who can offer the financial and emotional support as well as very simple and straightforward things like respite, baby-sitting time, playtime with the child to give the mom some time off. Unfortunately, I think what we find in the studies is that the majority of teen mothers do not have the familial, social, or financial supports that they need. Therefore, the decision to parent a child definitely secures a single mom or a teen mom's drop into poverty, and I don't think that's to anybody's benefit in this society. We haven't been able to find a way that addresses that problem.

We also know that teen mothers have a significantly higher school dropout rate than their counterparts do, and that truly does not set them up in a very good direction for their adult life. If they are not completing high school, what are the chances that they're going to be securing a well-paying job that has a career future to it with any kind of security or financial security involved here?

It's important that we have agencies like Terra – and I know there's another agency similar to it in Calgary – that are supportive to teenage moms to stay in school, to complete their schooling, and if they have their children with them, they will be well cared for in an understanding environment. If we can encourage these young women to complete their schooling, that will, I think, help them a great deal as they move into the future.

So that's a sort of brief discussion about schooling and the importance of that, and perhaps that's one of the strategies that we can look at: how can we be more supportive of young women who have teenage pregnancies?

There are definitely health consequences. We know that there are consistently lower birth weights than average for the children of teenage mothers. Also the health concerns and the health risks to the women themselves: I think some other people have already spoken to that. I think anything that we can do to strengthen young people's health awareness and understanding of their

reproductive health life right from the beginning – they keep telling women now that they should be aware of and be working on things like osteoporosis. That kind of preventative health care should start when they're very young. We don't seem to be encompassing that kind of health teaching into our society and into our school system. We need to be looking to that.

We've talked about poverty. We've talked about health risks, both for a baby of a teenage mother and for the mother herself, but if we've cut her off from good health and from schooling and we have poverty involved, I think then you really do have increased risks of child welfare involvement and perhaps even addictions and abuse. That's where support from the family and from the circle of friends is particularly important. That's obviously also where you have the legislators involved and the department of social services. A lot of other societal things are brought into play here. We should be able to get to a point where those things are not necessary and we're not having to involve them. We don't seem to be able to move beyond it.

I think we do need to look again at our comprehensive sex education component in the curriculum. I'm aware that that makes some people uncomfortable or they have a cultural background that precludes that. I don't think we've been totally successful at implementing comprehensive sex education in our schools or in some way that is accessible to young people. As much as we'd like to say: "Please abstain. Please just say no. Please just don't do this," obviously we as a society have not been terribly successful in getting that message across. Kids do do it, and nowadays when they do it, they are also putting themselves at significant health risks.

When we start talking about sexually transmitted diseases and killing diseases like HIV or AIDS, it's not enough for us to just hope that they won't. I think we have to be far more comprehensive in the way we present this to young people and educate them in how to take care of themselves for their whole lifetime and how to be good managers of their reproductive health, and for that I'm talking both sexes. I don't think we want to see our young people jeopardizing their health, particularly with some of the diseases that are available now, because we were squeamish about teaching comprehensive sex education. That's too high a price to pay in my opinion.

We also, as has been raised, have to deal with the sexual assault that we see. In an astoundingly high percentage of teenage pregnancies we find that there is a history of sexual abuse behind that. I think there have been some programs that have been introduced by this government, but we have to take that entire situation seriously if we're going to understand it and truly eradicate sexual assault at any age in our society, because we are beginning to make these links now. If we have a young person who feels that they've been abused and have a different attitude towards sexuality as a result of it, yeah, we've caused them a lot of trouble and we're going to cause ourselves a lot of trouble.

The teen pregnancy rate in Alberta has followed a national pattern, as was mentioned, and did decline up to 1987, and after '87 it's risen and then seems to have stayed fairly level since then. Part of the problem that we're having, when we look now at the strategies that we would need to really deal effectively with the problem of teenage pregnancies, is we're not keeping very good track of our statistics. We now have 17 different regional health authorities. As far as I can tell, each health region has a different way of collecting statistics on this and reporting it. So it's very difficult for us to get an overall view in Alberta.

When we're estimating pregnancy rates, we should be including

the number of the live births, stillbirths, and reported abortions in order to have a total picture of the pregnancy rate in Alberta and then the other components of that when we're looking at what possible strategies we need and could be putting in place to deal with any of these areas. As a result of having a scattered approach to this or an inconsistent approach to this by the different regional health authorities, I think it's really hampered our ability to identify and plan around this.

Complicating that, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo was mentioning, is that we have a centralization of abortion services in either Edmonton or Calgary. So that really doesn't tell us specifically what's happening in any of the other regions except for Edmonton and Calgary, and those are complicated, because everyone from the rest of the province is coming into there. We're not getting a clear picture of the socioeconomic demographics: poverty, education. The programs that are available are not available in other areas of the province that are perhaps contributing to this. So I would strongly suggest that maybe one of the strategies that could be integrated here is to look at a provincially co-ordinated comprehensive reporting structure of teen pregnancies by region, and that would involve getting all of the RHAs to agree to collect the information and to report it in the same way.

4:20

My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo has already talked about access to abortion services.

One of the things that I think is important and that I think we need to look more at is what the agencies that are working in the community have learned. I find often that when I'm looking to truly understand a program, if I go to the agencies that are working on the front line and talk to their staff, they are best able to explain what is going on – and it certainly gets you out from underneath the dome disease – so that we do have a clearer understanding of what's happening.

I think part of what we need to be looking at here is the funding and adequate funding of those frontline agencies. I am hearing a rumour around funding for Planned Parenthood. Now, that's an agency that's recognized around the world for the programs and the work that they have done. They have been tremendously responsive to the community developing programs for different ethnocultural groups and languages and have really done quite astounding work in that area. We know that they're successful when they have adequate resources, yet we seem to be pulling those resources back from them. That simply does not make sense to me. Along with the adequate funding of agencies, we should be looking at the community health centres and the STD clinics, for instance, where, as an access point, we have young people coming into the system.

Certainly programs like Terra – I'm sorry; I can't remember the name of the one in Calgary – which are assisting in enabling young mothers to complete education and to avail themselves of living skills that will assist them the rest of their lives and hopefully help them to turn a corner and to move on to a better life for themselves and their child, programs like that really need support, and I'd like to see adequate support given to programs like that. The new head office for Terra is actually in my riding, and I've been down there for their open house. As I looked around, I looked at the amount of fund-raising schemes they're doing and how hard the executive director and the senior staff are out there trying to raise a buck. You think: these are intelligent people who have been trained specifically in this area, and what are they are doing? They're out there working casinos and bingos

and raffles and pull tickets and race-a-thons. They're spending up to 50 percent of their time just trying to raise funds for these agencies, and this strikes me as a little backwards. If we as legislators are interested in resolving some of these issues, why aren't we funding these agencies and allowing them to get on with the work that they're good at rather than making them get out there and be flogging bonanza tickets at a bingo?

I think the other area that we want to look at is early intervention, the early intervention programs that are available, some of them through community health programs and anywhere else it is possible to be giving good information to younger people, and maybe some of that is working with media image. If it doesn't work for us to be shaking our fingers at them and saying, "You shouldn't be doing this, young person" – you know, how many young people are going to listen to that? – maybe we have to find more innovative approaches and integrate some of the media that is so attractive to them to get the message across.

That leads me to my final point, which is the whole media image that so many young people are pulled into around sexuality and around body image and around roles that they're expected to play. I don't think there's anybody in this Chamber that can stand up in here and say that the current media image that's available and constantly on display . . . And I'm out of time.

Thank you for this opportunity.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put the question to conclude debate on this motion under consideration.

[Motion carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Point of Order

Waiving Rules by Unanimous Consent

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wonder if I might rise on a point of order. In light of the fact that there are only three minutes left in the time for Motions Other than Government Motions, might we seek unanimous consent of the House to waive the Standing Orders and allow us to move on to government business at this point?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, does the Assembly agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

AN HON. MEMBER: Opposed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay.

Flunitrazepam

511. Mrs. Forsyth moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to strongly encourage the federal government to move the drug flunitrazepam, Rohypnol, and its related drug family from schedule 4 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to schedule 1 in light of its use as a sedative to render a person unconscious for the purpose of sexual assault; properly educate the general public, targeting high

school and postsecondary students, about its effects and the need to seek medical and police attention if it is believed they were a victim of an assault; provide detailed information about this drug to travelers leaving Canada for destinations where this drug is currently legal; and work cooperatively with other governments to ban the use, distribution, and manufacture of this drug.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. When I had this motion drafted, I had only one concern, and that was: did it go far enough? Did this motion address those things I believe needed to be addressed in regards to the drug Rohypnol? I believe it does, but as with all motions, it only encourages the government to do something; it does not force them. However, I hope in this instance the federal government will act quickly in banning the drug Rohypnol.

This motion, as members can see, addresses four main areas in relation to the drug Rohypnol, including moving it from schedule 4 of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to schedule 1, educating the public on its effects, providing information to travelers who will be entering a country where this drug is legal, and working with other governments to ban the use, distribution, and manufacture of this drug. This is not a short wish list, Madam Speaker, but when I detail some of the stories related to this drug and its effect on people's lives, I believe all members will agree that something needs to be done and needs to be done now.

This drug looks remarkably like an ordinary aspirin. It has no taste, no odour, no colour, dissolves quickly in a drink, and is absolutely terrifying. Madam Speaker, this drug has 10 times the sedative power of Valium, and because of its sedative powers it can be used to knock a person unconscious. Once unconscious these people, who are mostly women, are raped. The drug has many street names, with its most popular being the date rape drug. I personally do not feel this name is an accurate one, because quite simply it is a rape drug. It can be used by anyone or at anytime. This small white pill is dropped into a person's drink and because of its properties is not detectable. The person, most often a woman, who consumes that drink will within three to 30 minutes begin to feel and act very drunk and eventually black out.

Madam Speaker, I have heard and read many stories about this drug, and I would like to relate one of the stories to the members of the Assembly today. Before I do, however, I will remind members that this drug was not widely known about and certainly when this story took place was not in the media's eye. But once I have finished, the Assembly will understand the reason we need to educate the public, especially women, about this drug as soon as possible. The woman in this story did not have the benefit of knowing this drug existed before her ordeal, so let's give others the knowledge before they fall victim.

A young woman was traveling to Mexico with friends for a getaway, and, as many young people, they were there for sun and relaxation. On this woman's last night in Mexico she was at a bar with the friend she was traveling with as well as those she had met while she was in Mexico. Soon after arriving at the bar, the woman began to look and act very intoxicated. Some of the Canadian men she had met there offered to take her home because she wasn't feeling well, and they were on their way back to the hotel anyhow.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: Private Bills
head: Third Reading
4:30

[The members indicated below moved that the following Bills be read a third time, and the motions were carried]

Pr. 1	Tanya Marie Bryant Adoption Termination Act	Cao
Pr. 2	Innovative Insurance Corporation Amendment Act, 1998	Klapstein
Pr. 4	Millennium Insurance Corporation Act	Tarchuk

head: Private Bills
head: Second Reading

Bill Pr. 3
Alberta Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 1998

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, the Alberta Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 1998.

The bill has been recommended by the Standing Committee on Private Bills.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading

Bill 35
Colleges, Technical Institutes and Universities Statutes Amendment Act, 1998

[Debate adjourned April 2: Mr. Sapers]

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When we last were debating Bill 35, it was following a challenge that was issued by the minister responsible for tuition caps. That minister said that it would be a shame if government policy saw a redistribution of tax dollars that flowed from the middle class to the wealthier class or a redistribution of support for students that flowed from, I suppose, those students who in the minister's mind would be deserving to some students who in the minister's mind wouldn't be deserving. Now, this is a very, very interesting if not distorted view of the world, and I would like to just explain those comments for just a moment.

First of all – and I know because of the minister of advanced education's liberal roots he'll understand this – what governments do in Canada is collect tax money, and then they spend that tax money on behalf of taxpayers. I suppose you could say, Madam Speaker, that what governments do is tax and spend, and that's whether they are Conservative governments or Liberal governments or New Democrat governments. That's what governments do. When they do that, when they make those tax-and-spend decisions, responsible governments don't collect a penny more of tax revenue than they need to meet the objectives of their social policy. So a responsible government wouldn't have a penny of a

surplus, because what that means is that they have taken too much money out of the taxpayer's pocket.

[The Speaker in the chair]

But that being said, a responsible government would tax, then have priorities for how that tax money was going to be redistributed. They would redistribute that tax money so that it would have the greatest good for the greatest number, supposedly, because you wouldn't want a government that picked favourites or a government that picked winners and losers or a government that decided they were going to support their friends, let's say, at the expense of somebody else. So they would put that tax money, that public money into those programs and public institutions that provided the greatest public good.

Certainly no single member of this Assembly would argue that publicly funded advanced education institutions don't serve a broad public good. I think there's pretty reasonable agreement on both sides of the House that publicly supporting advanced education is a sound public policy and that it has a broad public benefit. So the question about whether or not we should have tuition policy that rewards some and punishes others is a strange notion indeed. If in fact the basis of advanced education is to provide a universal public good, a universal public benefit, then every citizen should have equally unfettered access to the same public good; i.e., the same access to a place at a postsecondary or advanced education institution.

Now, if the minister was arguing that you would have the child of a wealthy family getting the same benefit as the child of a not wealthy family if tuition was affordable for everybody, then I suppose I'd have to agree with the minister. But that's the basis of a universal public good. In fact, the way that in this society we address whatever perceived imbalance may flow from that kind of universal public good is we have a progressive tax policy. What a progressive tax policy does is it recaptures those investments through taxation.

The link here, Mr. Speaker, is that there is research to indicate in this province, in this country, and around this world that those individuals who benefit from postsecondary education tend to more quickly enter the workforce at higher income levels and maintain higher income careers for longer than those people who have not had the benefit of postsecondary education. If that's true, then in a system that has a progressive tax regime, governments recapture their investment at an accelerated rate because those students who once received the benefit of tuition policy which moderated the cost of admission end up paying back in taxes far more than they received, because they have been in the workforce longer, at higher income levels, with more stable careers, et cetera, et cetera, and create in fact the very strength of the economy which we can all be so proud of.

So the argument that we would be doing a disservice to low-income Albertans if we allowed high-income Albertans to benefit from the same tuition policy that the others would benefit from is a difficult argument for this member to accept.

MR. DUNFORD: That wasn't my argument, and you know it, Howard.

MR. SAPERS: All right. Well, the minister is indicating to me, Mr. Speaker, that it wasn't his argument. If I misheard the argument, I'm willing to listen again. I hope that the minister will clarify that, because it was his challenge when he introduced

this bill, and I want to make sure that I understand the challenge.

Bill 35 can be broken down into essentially two parts. A principled part, which is that there should be a legislated tuition cap. The Official Opposition is in favour of a legislated tuition cap. It has been a feature of our advanced education policy for years. I'm glad that the government has finally listened, and I'm glad to see it. I'll be supporting that part of the bill. A legislated tuition cap is absolutely the right thing to do.

The second part of the bill talks about at what level that cap should be set, and here the government has fallen a little bit off the rails. The government would have the cap legislated to equal the government's current policy, which is that tuition should not exceed 30 percent of the cost of instruction. [interjections] Pardon me; 30 percent of the net operating expense, not the cost of instruction. Absolutely right. I misspoke, so I'll be clear. The current policy is that the tuition should not exceed 30 percent of the net operating expense of the institution.

4:40

Now, it's very interesting that this bill, besides having these two main features, does a couple of other things, one by commission and the other by omission. What the bill omits is a calculation of what net operating expense is, and what the bill commits is that the minister may upon application waive the 30 percent cap. The waiving of the 30 percent cap has been characterized by some student leaders in this province as the minister of advanced education's own little notwithstanding clause.

The minister of advanced education has explained that the reason why he needs this backdoor escape notwithstanding clause is that if a postsecondary education institution in Alberta had capacity that was not filled and they were in the process of recruiting students to fill those excess spaces, they may be at risk of blowing the minister's legislated tuition cap if they actually collected tuition from those students that would therefore bring the combined total income, gross income, of the institution to a level where tuition exceeded the 30 percent cap of net operating expenses. I see the minister at this point nodding in agreement that I understand that part of his explanation correctly.

Now, my question to the minister – or maybe I should put it more aggressively as a challenge, seeing as we were challenged the other day. My challenge to the minister is this. If the university or technical institute or college would be free to apply to the minister to collect tuition in excess of the 30 percent cap, why couldn't the minister's bill contemplate the situation – think about this for a minute – of the minister having the ability upon application to roll back tuition levels? Think about that.

So what we would have is the same situation that the minister was explaining: excess capacity, students still applying, the institution wanting to fill those spaces at risk of blowing the cap. Why couldn't the institution come back and say: "You know, Mr. Minister, we overestimated the amount of money we needed from tuition fees, so instead of asking you to allow us to exceed the 30 percent, we're going to ask you for permission to roll back. That way we can stay below whatever the legislated cap is as well, and we could actually rebate tuition dollars to students, because we clearly don't need it." So my challenge to the minister would be to explain why his bill contemplates only the collection of more money than would otherwise be needed from students and not less or at least holding the line.

Bill 35 is another one of these government initiatives which puts the Official Opposition into a real quandary. On the one hand we absolutely concur with the need for a legislated cap – and there are complete arguments that most members in this House are

aware of to support that position – but we don't agree with the fact that there's no legislated calculation, we don't agree with the escape clause, and we don't agree with the level being 30 percent. So what's an Official Opposition member to do? Well, what we plan on doing, Mr. Speaker, is we plan on introducing through debate not just arguments to support our position but also amendments that would encourage the government to see their way clear to do the right thing and actually make this a truly progressive and useful policy exercise for Alberta students.

I will note, Mr. Speaker, that in 1994-95 universities were relying on tuitions to the degree of less than 18 percent of their net operating expenses; public colleges, less than 14 percent; technical institutes, less than 15 percent. Some would argue that fiscal '94-95 were the blackest years for Alberta postsecondary institutions because that was the first fiscal year where they had to absorb the 21 percent chop that was taken out of their budgets. So if in the worst times in recent memory for postsecondary institutions these institutions did not have to rely on much more than 15 to 18 percent of tuition, why is it in this climate of enlightened reinvestment, as the government would have us believe, we are being told that universities and colleges and technical institutes must rely on upwards of 30 percent, twice as much as they had to in the darkest times? It doesn't make a lot of sense.

In '95-96 the average was around 19 percent between those three postsecondary sectors. Of course, the Alberta Liberal opposition has on the Order Paper private member's Bill 214, sponsored by my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Woods, which would set tuition levels at a much more reasonable level of 20 percent of net operating expenses. The 20 percent is based on what students have told us they think is fair, what history has taught us students can afford, and also on what we see from past practice that administrations need to rely on to balance their own books.

So we will have a debate around the relative merits of 20 versus 30 percent. During that debate we will be mindful of the fact that up until very recently universities, colleges, and technical institutes didn't need much more than 20 percent to get the job done, and that was with increasing enrollment, that was with expanding capacity, and that was with absorbing technology costs, inflation costs, and a myriad of other expenses.

Mr. Speaker, it might be interesting to know that tuition has a direct impact on enrollment. In fact, according to the Alberta government in a high school survey published in 1996, 38 percent of high school students said that the number one reason they won't go into postsecondary education is because it's too expensive. Furthermore, when the University of Calgary surveyed students who left the University of Calgary in 1995 – and they published the report in 1996 – the University of Calgary reported that 30.7 percent of students who dropped out of the University of Calgary in '95 cited work pressures and other financial concerns as the main reason for leaving university.

Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, \$25,000 is now the expected average debt load for a student starting a degree in 1997. Now, \$16,000 was the average for a student graduating in 1997. The average debt load is expected to rise by nearly \$10,000 as you compare students who are finishing their degree versus those students who are just starting their degree. This rise puts a chill into the hearts of families who have one or more children who would like to pursue a postsecondary education.

Mr. Speaker, even though the policy of the government would be that the maximum yearly tuition increase for the University of

Calgary would only calculate out to \$215, when you adjust that for current dollars for a student taking five courses at the U of C in 1997-98, what you find is the actual real-dollar tuition increase had grown to \$290 one year over the other, above the government's own policy. What all of this tells us is that students have been marching uphill against rising tuitions in the last number of years, and those years have been the same years that have been characterized by massive budget cuts, cuts to the grants that these postsecondary institutions have had to endure.

Mr. Speaker, the calculation for a tuition cap will also be the source of a complete debate, and I see that the minister of advanced education is ever anxious to enter that debate. I think that he and I will be able to relive our glory days in university, and I'd be willing to do that with him. But what's going to be more important to families and to students is the government explaining how a tuition cap policy can be a complete policy without a calculation of net operating expense. I would like to suggest that the simplest and most complete calculation is the most appropriate calculation, and that would fall on both sides of the equation.

So let's take a look at the net operating expense of the university or the college or the technical institute, including the buildings and the administration and ancillary services and all of the infrastructure. But let's also calculate on the part of the student all of the costs that have to do not just with tuition but with student fees, with levies, with health plans, with campus recreation charges, books, lab fees, entrance fees to various services on campus that students pretty much have to become involved with. Let's make it a complete calculation on both sides so that the true cost burden is calculated.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that a student entering university in Alberta this year will be looking at a combined investment on their own part of in excess of \$110,000 over the course of their degree, and that would of course include forgone wages if they were in the job market. The cost to a student of a hundred thousand dollars or more may still be seen as a relatively good investment on their part. I would argue that in fact it's probably the best investment they can make, and I'm not suggesting for a minute that students don't receive good value for the choice they make to forgo earning income and pursue postsecondary education.

What I am suggesting, however, is that it is about time that government policy fully recognized the contribution that students do make to their own education and put to rest the argument that students somehow are getting an unwarranted bargain at public expense and that students somehow are pampered and are taking advantage of government largesse and that somehow all of those people who are involved in the postsecondary education industry are taking advantage of government largesse and that somehow professors get paid too much and that students don't get charged enough and that education should boil down to nothing more than a commercial transaction and that institutions should be able to charge whatever the market will bear. This would not be enlightened social policy.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 35, a long awaited bill which the minister of advanced education has been promising to us and now is before us.

In introducing the bill on March 31, the minister made reference to the fact that he had met with student leaders in the province, that he received their input. In fact, he indicated that the hon. Premier also accompanied him at the time of this meeting. It is gratifying to know that the minister and the Premier were interested in meeting with the student leaders, albeit these student leaders are perhaps in the last phase of their stay at the universities and they themselves would be spared the effects of the cap the minister is bringing in. They will have long left the colleges, institutes, and universities of this province before the 30 percent cap hits the pockets of those who are still at school next year and the year after.

I think this attempt to consult with this however limited number of students and student leaders is something that is to be commended. However, I find that although the minister did make an effort to meet with the students and hear their concerns, he didn't quite listen to what they were saying. I have two letters here. One is from the Alberta College and Technical Institute Students' Executive Council, and this one is signed by Heather Wilkey. The other one is from Heather Taylor. She is vice-president external of the University of Alberta Students' Union.

I find that the impression one could get from what the minister had to say on March 31 in this House – although his remarks are carefully couched in language that is masterful in its ambiguity – is that somehow he not only talked to these student leaders but had their support for the bill. I just want to disabuse the House of that impression, and if I'm the only one who got that impression, if everyone else fully understood what the minister was saying, then I take my words back.

This is what the students have to say. Heather Wilkey, after talking about the fact that there were some misconceptions when they met with the standing policy committee and before that with the ministers, some misconceptions that the students agree with the current 30% tuition policy – she obviously tries to distance herself from this. On the next page she says:

Our research to date indicates that, even at current tuition levels, there are . . .

And I want to emphasize this.

. . . enormous financial problems, accessibility issues and debt issues facing students today. This situation will only worsen as tuition continues to climb.

Then a couple of paragraphs later she says:

It is still our position that the expected student contribution of 30% is too high. Student leaders from across the province met this past week in Lethbridge and reaffirmed ACTISEC's policy that 20% is a reasonable contribution for students. In addition to legislating a tuition cap, the government might also consider the possibility of a tuition freeze with a progressive rollback on tuition to a more reasonable level.

That's what I heard from the president of the college students association.

Now to Heather Taylor's letter. Heather Taylor again expresses serious concerns. She says, "Our third concern is about the percentage," and that's what I'll talk about.

The Conservatives have been touting 30% as the appropriate tuition cap, the Liberals have gone with 20% and the Chamber of Commerce [of course] likes 50%. The one thing that they all have in common is that they are percentages . . .

These three groups refer to percentages.

. . . which mean very little for students on a fixed budget. When we tell the students at our school that they are currently footing 23% of the U of A's expenditures . . . that does not register. The only thing that regular students are concerned with is how much in dollars their tuition is going to rise the next year. That is because when students work part-time or full-time jobs during

the summer and the school term, they are being paid in dollars and not percentages. If we are truly looking to identify a responsible contribution that students should make to cover their educational costs, we should also consider what they can reasonably afford to pay. This cannot be done currently. In fact, no explicit consideration is given in the current provincial policy of what level of tuition fees students can reasonably afford. This assessment would have to take into consideration the earning potential of students during the year (especially the summer), the cost of living for an average student, the number of dependents (if any), etc. Ultimately, what we would require is a tuition cap that reflects not just what students should pay, but also what students can pay. We believe that we can only achieve this by stating in dollars terms what the tuition cap is, and not in the percentages that are currently used.

5:00

So much for the students' implied support for the minister's bill. I literally read from the two letters.

Now, moving from there to some concerns that were reported to have been expressed in a page and a half of write-up by an *Edmonton Journal* reporter on Sunday, March 29, 1998. There are two parents who are quoted here. Since I'm quoting from section F, an inside section of the *Edmonton Journal*, I will refer to the names. Bill Chrapko and his wife, Helen, are co-presidents of the University of Alberta parents' association. They express quite serious concerns even about the current levels of tuition.

So the minister might assume that he has consulted widely and has broad support for the legislation that he is bringing in with respect to the 30 percent cap. He proudly wore that cap the other day. I noticed him and the Minister of Education – they were the Bobbsey twins, I think – wearing those caps. They looked kind of nice but funny. Certainly this public display of apparently championing the cause of students doesn't seem to have the support of either the students or parents who have their children at school.

Similarly, like Mr. and Mrs. Chrapko, there is also a reference to another parent who is very concerned and is quoted here, Don Gelin. He is the president of the parent council at Old Scona academic high school. Mr. Speaker, this high school is right in the heart of my constituency, so I find it necessary to emphasize the importance of what Mr. Gelin has to say. He has a daughter who's at school now. He has a younger daughter and a son who is only six. This parent is extremely worried about how he is going to finance, even at the current tuition levels, the postsecondary education of his children, which he as an earnest parent considers it his duty to support if he can, but he thinks he cannot. He says, "If the cost of going to university continues to rise, it could rise faster than my ability to save" and pay. Again I quote him.

I don't really consider myself a radical. I don't jump on issues and go off hog wild. But I want to put my kids through post-secondary education without mortgaging my life to do it.

He works as a provincial forester. His wife is home with the kids. At this point they're relying on the likelihood that their daughter, who is an honour student now in Old Scona high school, will win a scholarship. "We're banking on that because I haven't got much else to bank on."

Mr. Speaker, neither the parents nor the students seem to be all that thrilled with the minister's bill that is before us, Bill 35. Bill 35 obviously is an attempt to state in statutory terms that this government, at least for the moment, is committed to a so-called 30 percent cap. A 30 percent cap, as the minister has indicated in this bill, is meant to make sure that once these levels are

reached, by say the year 2000 or beyond, the dollar amount will remain more or less stable, I suppose, in terms of what the students have to pay. However, the minister has, I'm sure, no control over the operating costs, however they are defined. The minister has promised of course by way of this bill that he will make sure that those are carefully defined and take into account student concerns about how they get defined. Certainly the rate of growth in operating costs is not within the minister's own power. Consequently, even the 30 percent cap is a mirage. It's a mirage perhaps never to be reached, and that's another point that students and their parents need to understand.

The notion of 30 percent should not be seen to mean that come the year 2001, the dollar amounts will not go on growing. We don't know at what rate, but it's a certainty that they will keep on growing. I think the minister realizes this, and in his introductory remarks – again I quote him from *Hansard* – he seems to pit the students against the administrators of colleges and universities in a nice, polite, gentle manner, which is his style of course. Nevertheless that's what it means. He says:

Students, as sharp as they are these days, don't take long to quickly understand that if we don't have administrators out there that are controlling costs in an effective and efficient way, then of course up are going to go the net operating expenditures, and up goes their tuition with it. So we are going to be discussing issues like that

and not either the freezing of tuition fees at their present levels and then rolling them back or some other issues.

I find it interesting that first the minister and his government have been responsible for bringing in massive cuts of 21 percent starting in '94. They have achieved that condition of chronic underfunding of these institutions, and then he promises students that fees will grow and, in fact, without any regulated annual increase. There's no mention in this bill that the institutions cannot in one year go up to just about under 30 percent with respect to the increases that they may ask their students to pay for their tuition. So as long as they remain under 30 in the year '99, they can get to that point.

Another curious thing about this bill: it seems to indirectly encourage institutions to go as fast as they can to increase tuition fees so long as they remain just under 30 percent for the year 1999-2000. Then he turns around and says that the students should now get into debate with their administrators, university presidents, and deans to see how they can make those institutions more efficient and more effective than they have been, as if these institutions have been rolling in money over the last 10 years and haven't really achieved the efficiencies that are possible to achieve under the conditions of growing enrollments, deteriorating and depleting infrastructures, and continuing inflation. All of these factors are ignored, and clearly the students are now urged to go and get at their administrators and faculties to ensure that greater efficiencies and effectiveness are achieved. It's rather ironic that the minister should take this view of the condition at institutions, which still seem to be slack in the way they spend the public dollar as well as the revenues they derive from tuition fees.

5:10

Mr. Speaker, in view of this, I think it's difficult for me to see what this bill is supposed to achieve. It doesn't certainly reflect the agreement of students. It seems to be a decision from the minister's office which directs everyone to accept what position he has taken and what position his government has espoused over the last three or four years. He simply wants to, in fact, put this thing in cement so that no one can roll back, no one can say that

they should be rolled back. So I think it's a bill that doesn't really, at least on my part, sort of call for much enthusiasm in its support.

I was quite curious about one part of it. The minister said on that day, on March 31, that the changes that were made in the three parts – the Technical Institutes Act and the Colleges Act and the Universities Act – are identical, but I find one on page 4 of the bill that in the case of the universities, while the minister's approval would be necessary to set the tuition fees to be paid by its students, “any other fees that the board considers necessary to be paid by its students” do not require the minister's approval. That's an interesting leeway again that's given to institutions. So once they reach the 30 percent, they certainly have the field wide open under conditions of chronic underfunding to then look for ways other than increasing their tuition fees to impose, include, or increase other kinds of fees in order to generate revenues to fund their faltering institutions. I would certainly be listening carefully to the minister when he has a chance to address some of these points that I'm raising here.

The issue of chronic underfunding, Mr. Speaker, is like a chronic disease: it doesn't kill you right away, but it wears you down. That's exactly what's happened to students. That's why they are now desperately looking for some sort of cap, and when the minister mentioned cap, they fell for it. At first blush, they thought that was the only way they could stop this roller-coaster from going on and on and on. So they were worn down, and then the minister gives them a little bit of a reprieve and says: it's 30 percent, not 40 percent; I made a mistake on that one. But it's like a chronic illness. It wears you down year by year until you can't function anymore.

Mr. Speaker, my time is gone, and I certainly would be looking forward to the minister's response to some of these questions.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to join in debate on Bill 35, the legislated tuition cap. It's not without some reluctance, because it wasn't that long ago that I asked the previous minister in this portfolio about legislating tuition caps. I think we were reminded earlier today in question period what that minister's response was. I don't have the exact words, but the intent of his remarks was that a legislated tuition cap wouldn't be worth much more than the paper that it was written on. He dismissed out of hand our call at that time to have the tuitions legislated. So it's with that background that I come to Bill 35. I hope and I assume that it's not the current minister's position that this legislation can be dismissed as easily, although, as has been indicated, he has left himself an escape clause.

I think we have to resist a feeling that we should maybe rant and rave about tuition. I think it's such a serious problem that it really does deserve some serious consideration. I think it has to start with what has led to this pressure on tuition at our post-secondary institutions across the province. There are some easy answers of course: the increased costs that institutions face in terms of staff salaries and equipment, infrastructure that they have to work with, the impact of inflation on those costs, the impact of staff settlements, although they have certainly not driven the kinds of increases we've seen. I think what has really precipitated the problem in our province has been the cuts that were endorsed by 85 percent of the population in the 1993 election where Albertans said: “Look. We are seriously alarmed at the deficit, we're

seriously alarmed at the growth of the debt, and we want to see something done about that."

The actions growing out of the government that was formed after that election, I think, in the cuts and the way in which the cuts were instituted have eventually led to some pressure to increase dramatically the tuitions that were charged at postsecondary institutions. So it's rooted in that history and those economics that we find ourselves faced with the kind of legislation we have to today.

The reaction to those cuts has been to do two things in terms of students and their role, and that has been to increase tuition and, secondly, to increase loans or loan amounts available to those students. The growth in the tuition fees has been dramatic. In the one-year period, 1995 to 1996-97, in Alberta it was 9.7 percent. In the time period 1991-92 to 1996-97 the percentage increase was 95.6 percent, an incredible 96 percent almost. In the period from 1986-87 to 1996-97 the increase was 208 percent. No other province has that except Quebec. It's been dramatic, huge, and I would say an increase that has not been justified in terms of what students and their parents have been asked to pay.

Curiously, those tuitions have been imposed by a generation, including many of these people in this House, that were the benefactors of postsecondary school programs that were some of the most reasonable in the country. We, in our postsecondary programs, many of us were beneficiaries of grants and programs and low tuitions and active recruitment by those institutions to enroll. So it is a little ironic that we're the ones here today legislating what are going to be unmanageable tuitions for many students in the province, tuitions that will exclude a large part of the population, given the kinds of economics they're based on.

5:20

If you look at the impact of the tuition increases on students, they have a variable impact. I've spoken several times before about this variable impact and particularly the impact it has on low-income Albertans. Just some of the good research coming south of the border on that impact and then some of the anecdotal information from our own community about that impact I think makes it a real concern. It's an area that I hope the present government will take seriously and do something in terms of systematically establishing what that impact is on low-income families who are scared away from postsecondary institutions for two reasons: one, high prices; sticker shock, an author has labeled it. But when students from low-income families are faced with high tuition, they are scared off before they ever get to the point of considering enrolling. They feel it's not within the realm of possibility because the price is so high.

One of the other actions that has been taken, as I indicated, was to make available larger and larger loans for students, and that has exactly the same impact on low-income families. They are scared off going into debt, whether it be for education or consumer goods. High debt on families who have limited income scares them away, and they won't access programs. The result of that is that when they do enter postsecondary programs, they will enroll in short programs, and they'll enroll in cheap or low-cost programs. These are some of the brightest people in our province making the decision about a career on the basis of hardly the best criteria we would hope they might use to make that decision.

I think the arguments to justify the increases really have been false arguments. We have been told time and time again that the individual student is the major beneficiary, the individual student is the one who profits from that education, and thus that student should pay. There has been little attention paid to the wider

benefits to our society, not just economically, but the fact that these students, compared to their peers, will access the health system less often, they'll lead healthier lifestyles for the most part, they'll access the criminal justice system less often, they'll be more profitably engaged, they will make a greater contribution, by volunteering and through public service, to the betterment of our community. Having some economists make the calculations or try to make the calculation and put a price tag on that contribution – their work shows a much greater gain to society than what the individual gathers from having completed a postsecondary education. So I think it's been a false argument, the one that's been used to justify tuition, and it's one that I don't think has convinced students that they should be paying more.

I think underlying the tuition increase are some assumptions that are very questionable, assumptions about families, 1998 families. A number of those families are not mom and dad working at profitable jobs and students continuing on careers from high school to postsecondary institutions. For a lot of Albertans that's not family life. It makes some assumptions about families and family spending that I think are questionable in a consumer society where we have encouraged not just Albertans – we live in a society that encourages people to invest in cars and homes and high-expense items. The value that's been placed on postsecondary education and borrowing for that has been lessened, and I think the assumptions about high tuition are questionable in that context.

I think there are some assumptions about the age of students, the notion that parents should be responsible for those students. Many of them no longer live at home after they're 18, and assuming that parents somehow or other should be responsible for some and not for others seems to me to be patently unfair. A large number of students are no longer the 18 year olds. The student population has increased in age over the years, and we see a large number of lone parents returning to those institutions, struggling to better themselves. Of course, I think one of the major assumptions and a false assumption has been the impact of increased tuition on students. So I think that those are some assumptions that should be looked at carefully by the government.

The hour draws near, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to close with a question about the future, because this isn't the end of it. Twelve percent wasn't the end of it in 1986, and 30 percent isn't the end of it in 1998, and we all know it. If there's one thing that this government does for postsecondary education that would have some lasting effect, it would be to put in place and take a serious look at the long-term financing of postsecondary education in this province, because that's got to be done. It may not be done now, but it's going to come. Until we do that, 30 percent caps or our own bill with 20 percent caps are going to be stopgap measures at best, and the long-term interests of Albertans are not going to be served.

So with those remarks, I conclude. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the few minutes that I have left I'll begin what I'd like to say on Bill 35, the Colleges, Technical Institutes and Universities Statutes Amendment Act.

MR. DUNFORD: Remember, you're my MLA.

MS BLAKEMAN: Oh, thank you for the reminder.

This is an interesting subject for me because Edmonton-Centre is the residence of a lot of students. I have a number of post-secondary institutions in the constituency: Grant MacEwan College downtown campus, Alberta College, Alberta Vocational College. Also, it's where a lot of the students live who attend NAIT and the University of Alberta.

I believe that education is an investment, and I think it's a long-term investment for this province, not only for the individuals that are involved. So the questions that are raised for me by what's being proposed in this bill have long-reaching implications. What

are our priorities as far as providing education or making educational opportunities available to young adults and, in some cases, for a lot of the educational institutions in Edmonton-Centre, not-so-young adults? I think the average age of people attending Grant MacEwan is about 35, so we're talking lifelong learning in that instance.

I feel that we're moving towards – or maybe we've arrived at – a money-before-people way that's coming out of this bill.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]

