

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Thursday, April 9, 1998 1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/04/09
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.
Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we ask for your strength and encouragement in our service of you through our services of others.
We thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province.
Amen.
Please be seated.
And to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, welcome back. [applause]

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you two of my constituents who are visiting us this afternoon. Mr. Danny Dalla-Longa is a former Member of this Legislative Assembly. Accompanying him is Shelley Kwinter. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present another petition signed by a number of people in support of protecting gays and lesbians from discrimination.
Thank you.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of letters from constituents and Albertans outside my constituency in support of the Supreme Court ruling regarding adding sexual orientation to the human rights bill. They number 22. I'd also like to table copies from constituents and some Albertans that are not in favour of the government adding sexual orientation to the Alberta Individual's Rights Protection Act. They number 357.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following a question from the Member for Edmonton-Calder yesterday, I'd like to table six copies of the final report of London Economics on their study of market power and mitigation methods for Alberta. These are opinions and conclusions of London Economics, and they were used as the basis for the formation of the policy that's inside Bill 27. This was sent to all members of the electric utility advisory committee.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. First are the 1997 reports of the Students Finance Board, the annual report, the Banff Centre Foundation, the University of Alberta Foundation, the University of Calgary Foundation, the University of Lethbridge Foundation, the Public Colleges Foundation of Alberta, the Athabasca University Foundation, and the Technical Institutes Foundation of Alberta.

Secondly, I have four copies of a memo from Mr. Jack Davis, the Deputy Minister of Executive Council, and Mr. Jim Dixon, Alberta's Public Service Commissioner, addressed to deputy ministers. Mr. Speaker, the memo outlines the management reward strategy which is the province's new compensation program for managers in the public sector.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I have four copies of a report that I've received on salaries for provincial government deputy ministers. This report is from a private-sector group that I commissioned. I do want to mention that Mr. Paul Wacko was a member of that committee, and certainly we express sympathy to his family on his passing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is from the University of Calgary, which is located in the heart of and is in many cases the heart of Calgary-Varsity. I'm proud to be a graduate of that fine institution. Four copies of their community report entitled *New Directions Now*.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I wish to table four copies of the Workers' Compensation Act Appeals Commission annual report noting that they have worked in their business plan to move down the period from initiation of appeals to disposition.

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, could you bear with me? I have three tablings to make. The first tabling is five copies of a letter addressed to Members of the Legislative Assembly expressing my gratitude for their kindness during my hospitalization and recovery, including the Premier, his near visit bumped because of surgery, the kind note of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Minister of Justice for sending flowers, the Minister of Community Development, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for bringing up a copy of the Throne Speech signed by the Premier, and my colleagues, the Member for Edmonton-Calder, who made sure I didn't miss anything that happened in this House, the Leader of the Opposition. I thank you all for the kindness that was shown. [applause]

My next tabling is my expenses for the last fiscal period, which I understand all Members of the Legislative Assembly have tabled.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, in compliance with the wishes of my constituents I'm tabling all the faxes and letters I've received and the results of phone calls to my constituency office and my home dealing with the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is 35 more letters, E-mails, and correspondence from constituents and other Albertans supporting the Supreme Court decision.

The second is an accounting of the letters and calls received by

my office both in support and against the Supreme Court decision, and I'd like to say that it's 88 percent in support of the decision.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table four copies of a letter from a constituent of mine. She is a young woman with three children who unfortunately was the victim of a bad blood transfusion in 1985, four months before the magical cutoff of 1986 regarding the hepatitis C compensation package.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table some documents in contrast to some of the information delivered by the Minister of Energy. This is a paper produced by his own department on Alberta electrical industry restructuring, a technical discussion paper titled Definitions: Residual Benefit & Stranded Costs. That's one tabling.

The second tabling is simply a graph that outlines what the expected values are in the year 2020. It's quite explicit, sir.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been asked to table five copies of letters and petitions regarding concerns in the county of Smoky Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a letter from a constituent of Edmonton-Manning to the environment minister stating his dismay at the increase of bureaucracy in the fishing and hunting licences.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

DR. WEST: Oh, yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce 24 students and nine adults from the Tulliby Lake school. They are from grades 6 to 9. They are accompanied by teachers Mr. Elgin Pawlak and Ms Sandra Lawson. They're in the northeast part of the province. It isn't a large school, but it is a strong school in the sense that they hold on to their values in Tulliby Lake and speak with principle and put that type of living into their children. I think that the Tulliby Lake school for its size exemplifies what we want out of our education system. I would ask them to stand – they're in the members' gallery – and receive the warm welcome of this House.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly four visitors that I have here today. Two of them are exchange students, and I hope I can pronounce their names properly. Klara Sebkova is from Prague 4, Czech Republic. She is attending the H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake, and she's in grade 12. Her host family is Trevor and Judy Henry of Smoky Lake. The next student is Natsuko Kodama of Ehime, Japan. She's also attending H.A. Kostash school and is in grade 10. Her host family is Sharon Doshewnek and family of Smoky Lake. They are seated

in the members' gallery. Also, accompanying them is Mrs. Judy Henry and her daughter Miss Shelby Henry. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions today. First, I would like to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly a gentleman who has been a fixture in our province in aboriginal affairs matters, Mr. Sam Sinclair. Accompanying him as well is one of his cohorts, Mr. Richard Whitford, of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples of Alberta. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a family who is visiting us in Edmonton from Sweden, Mr. Kenet Sjöström, his wife, Inger Sjöström, and their daughter Catrin. They're in the members' gallery, and I would also ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the House a constituent of mine, Dave Schroder, who is visiting the Legislative Assembly for his first time. He's a keen observer of politics and of the democratic process, and he's here to see it in action. I would ask him to rise and please receive the warm welcome of all my colleagues.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a resident of St. Albert and a director of network services for TransAlta, Mr. Yves Tremblay. He's seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

Leader of the Opposition

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, today is the last day the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung will sit in this Assembly as Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. On behalf of every member of the government caucus I rise to express my best wishes to the hon. member.

For many years, both inside and outside of the Legislative Assembly, the hon. member has represented his constituents and his party with skill, passion, and total dedication. He has continually brought distinction to this Assembly and its legacy of democracy and open debate.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I go back to 1989, and we have developed a bit of a special relationship. Ever since I was appointed to this Assembly, he has been my appointed critic. Although he and I have frequently disagreed on various issues, his commitment to building a strong Alberta has never been in doubt. I can honestly say that under his leadership the Liberal Party of Alberta has maintained a voice that continues to be heard by all members of this Assembly on both sides of the floor. In a democratic system such as ours, Mr. Speaker, it is so important to have an articulate and honourable opposition.

When this Assembly reconvenes after the Easter recess, the

Official Opposition will have a new leader. On behalf of my caucus colleagues I extend my best wishes to the hon. member as well as to his wife and family, whom I'm sure all understand too well the sacrifices and costs that leadership of a party can exact.

Mr. Speaker, I know this is a bit unparliamentary, but just this once allow me to say: Grant, thank you for a job well done.

Thank you. [applause]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, it's customary in Ministerial Statements to hear a response.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for allowing us to depart, if I might say, a little bit from tradition to do something that has meant a great deal to me and I know to my family as well.

I did almost react, as the opposition leader does. When the Premier, Ralph, called me Grant, I almost got up and said, "Point of order, Mr. Speaker."

I have found in what you have said, Mr. Premier, a great graciousness and thoughtfulness and consideration, and I appreciate it immensely. While it was a wonderful tribute to me – and I might tell you that I'll be saving that *Hansard* for my children and Teresa and my grandchildren – it also is a great tribute to how this Legislative Assembly does bring out the best in each and every one of us and is really ultimately a triumph of ideas and debate over personalities. You demonstrated that today, and I appreciate it greatly.

While I cannot say that every experience I have had as Leader of the Opposition has been pure pleasure – I notice that the Premier is laughing, and I would only ask him why he is laughing, because I think as leaders we share some understanding of what I mean – I can say that every one of these experiences I have savoured. They have been unequivocally challenging, and they have been deeply, deeply rewarding. As much as I have waited to be in government and have long wanted to be in government and longed to be in government, I have never wavered in the privilege that I have felt in being given the task of being an opposition member and an opposition leader over all the years that I have spent in this Legislative Assembly. I have been so fortunate to have had a caucus like this caucus to work with. I know the Premier will agree that it is a wonderful thing to work with a strong, dedicated, powerful group of people, and I would recognize each and every one of them.

I also have to say that there's been a special spice in my role as opposition leader, because I have, if I can admit this openly, faced one of the most successful Premiers and governments, one of the most prominent Premiers and governments in this entire country. Very few opposition leaders could claim to have had the chance to hone their skills in this important role against such a formidable, challenging government.

I also want to mention something of the Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you have indicated to all of us for the period of time that you've been in here something that's so important to this Legislative Assembly, and that is an undying, unwavering commitment to the integrity and the sense of importance and significance of this institution. I appreciate that very, very much.

I was honoured, as they will be, that you would have mentioned my family: Teresa, Lucas, Liam, and Grady. I know everyone in this Legislative Assembly knows how much they sacrifice and the dedication that we require of them and ask of them in order to do the jobs that we do. I am very, very privileged to have had the support I've had from the most remarkable wife, Teresa, and

three wonderful children over these 12 years in this time in opposition. In fact, they can take a great deal of credit for the strength that I have had to be able to perform this job.

1:50

I would also, of course, and most importantly like to thank the people of Alberta who have given me the trust to be an opposition leader and an opposition member. As every one of us knows, that is an undeniable privilege of great proportion and something that we take with us for the rest of our lives.

Finally, I would like to conclude simply by saying that I have been so fortunate to have had the time in this Legislative Assembly and the experiences that I have had. As Leader of the Opposition I have been immensely privileged to serve the people of Alberta in the capacity that I have been able to do so, and I have been very, very privileged as well to have been a leader amongst 82 other dedicated, committed leaders, each and every one of us committed to a single sense of purpose, and that is to continuing to ensure that Alberta is the best place in the world. [applause]

head:

Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. MITCHELL: Back to normal, Mr. Speaker.

Sexual Orientation

MR. MITCHELL: For seven years, Mr. Speaker, this government has fought hard in the courts, some would argue and I would, against equal rights for a group of Alberta citizens. This has fostered an atmosphere, unfortunately, of hatred and intolerance in this province. Some of the letters which our caucus has received and which I know the government has received and some of the phone calls are certainly evidence of that unfortunate circumstance. Today, very fortunately, the Premier has done the right thing. Given that this government has spent well over a million dollars fighting against equal rights for all Albertans, will the Premier commit to putting at least as much money into public education on this issue as he has spent fighting this case all the way to the Supreme Court?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure how much money has been spent, first of all, on the original trial relative to Vriend, the subsequent appeal, and then the appeal by Mr. Vriend to the Supreme Court of Canada. I can tell the hon. member that this situation and the meaning of the Supreme Court ruling has to be articulated, and it has to be articulated clearly so people know exactly what it means.

Mr. Speaker, beginning next week, I believe as early as Wednesday if we can get the copy prepared and finalized, advertisements will be going in newspapers throughout the province. It's anticipated that there will be a radio and television campaign as well to clearly articulate the meaning of the Supreme Court ruling so that Albertans can have a good understanding that this simply means that no longer will people be discriminated against relative to housing, employment, services, and some other areas on the basis of sexual orientation.

MR. MITCHELL: I think we're all very encouraged by that.

Given the lies – I use that word; it's a strong word – which are being circulated in this province by such groups as the Family Action Coalition, will the Premier commit specifically to at least

responding to that group's television ads, television ad for television ad, newspaper ad for newspaper ad, pamphlet for pamphlet, so that all Albertans can be assured of the truth?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a communications plan, and certainly we've got to get the facts out there as the facts are. We want to speak and articulate the situation as it relates to the facts of the situation. If we could concentrate on what this ruling means and concentrate on the law as it now stands – that is, the human rights legislation as it now stands – then I think Albertans will have a clearer understanding as to what it is that has happened over this past week.

MR. MITCHELL: Will the Premier commit to amending Alberta's human rights legislation to include sexual orientation so that Albertans can read our own document and know what their rights are instead of having to read a 100-page Supreme Court ruling?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Charter has not been amended, but it's quite clear now that sexual orientation has been read into the Charter as it has now been read into our legislation. So the legislation as it now stands includes sexual orientation.

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

Private Health Services

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier described his health-for-profit bill, Bill 37, as an "innocuous" piece of legislation. The last bill he described that way was the bill to extinguish the Charter rights of 703 sexual sterilization victims. My question to the Premier this afternoon is this: has his commitment to public health care for Albertans deteriorated to such an extent that he can describe as innocuous a bill which provides an absolute blueprint for the expanded role of private, for-profit health care services?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would argue that it doesn't. It simply provides safeguards that allow the Minister of Health to ensure that the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act are being met. If the hon. member wants to read something more into the bill than is already there, I guess that's entirely up to him, but I simply see this as a bill that provides some safeguards.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, during a previous session of this Assembly the opposition members were very concerned about proposals and of course the Health Resource Group clinic and requested, as did members of our caucus, that we have put in place a process whereby we can control, we have the power of approval, we make sure that there is not harm done to the public system with respect to the establishment of a private type of facility whether it's the Gimbel clinic or the HRG clinic. That is what this particular piece of legislation does. It provides for those controls and the ability to do it with a legislative mandate.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, this government's record on private health care speaks for itself.

My supplementary question, then, to the Premier would be this: how can the public have any confidence that the government will protect the public interest when it comes to health care when the

bill has been brought in without any public consultation, virtually lost in the storm of attention that's been focused on the Vriend decision?

MR. KLEIN: Oh, Mr. Speaker, there was no sinister plot to bring that piece of legislation in during the midst of a controversy on another issue. It was brought forth in the normal manner of bringing legislation to this Assembly. There is nothing surreptitious about this whatsoever. It's simply a bill to make sure that whatever is done relative to private health care, if you want to call it that, is done in accordance with the Canada Health Act, that it simply doesn't violate the Canada Health Act, and it gives the authority for the minister to deal with these situations on an as-needs basis.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my final question is: for all of those Albertans who have not been impressed with this government's bill preparation record, why will the Premier not do what was done with the health information bill, what the Premier proposes to do with the health professions bill, which is to let it die on the Order Paper, and if he still persists in doing this, bring it back next year after all Albertans have had a chance to be heard?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is before the Legislature now, and there is ample opportunity to have the bill debated, including the idea that it be allowed to die on the Order Paper. This bill will be treated the same as any other piece of legislation. Over 40 pieces of legislation have been brought to this Assembly thus far. They're all good pieces of legislation. Some of them have been approved already, and some have been enacted into law.

There are some occasions when legislation, very, very complex legislation, is taken out for public discussion. Indeed there were four years of public consultation prior to the introduction of Bill 27, the electrical deregulation bill. Mr. Speaker, I recall a bill that I introduced when I was the minister of the environment, the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, again a very complex bill that took about 10 pieces of legislation and consolidated that legislation, and it was deemed appropriate that that bill be taken out for public consultation.

But, Mr. Speaker, with the amount of legislation we deal with, there simply is not enough time. None of us would live long enough to have public consultation on each and every piece of legislation.

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

Doctors' Fee Negotiations

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over and over we hear this government claiming that children are its top priority, but yet again actions speak louder than words. Pediatricians are now limiting services, and the very health and well-being of Alberta's children are being jeopardized by the Minister of Health's lack of action. My questions are to the minister of privatization – the Minister of Health. With the health of Alberta's children at stake, what action is the minister taking to resolve the dispute?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to first of all just review some information with respect to the Calgary health

authority, because I suspect that the member is alluding to some job action that is evidently occurring in Calgary. We have provided to the Calgary health authority, the authority delivering service which includes the children's hospital, 51 additional millions of dollars in operating expenses, or 7.8 percent; \$105 million in capital and Y2K funding; another \$12 million, or 14.9 percent, to fund provincewide services. So I think we've taken very significant steps to make sure that the regional health authority has adequate funding.

This very unfortunate situation with respect to the children's hospital is part, I guess, of job pressure or part of a negotiation stance. We recognize that the pediatricians are a very, very important part, as are all doctors, of our overall health delivery system, but we stand ready to meet at the table to negotiate a contract with the Alberta Medical Association, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to pay all doctors in the province. The Alberta Medical Association itself some months ago requested that there be a two-month extension of the agreement, which we agreed to. Therefore, I think we are supporting health care in this province, including the children's hospital's patients.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, it's interesting to note that the Minister of Labour and the Premier were able to settle the support worker and LPN strikes within one day. What are you doing to settle the job action by the doctors?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, certainly I commend the Premier and the Minister of Labour with respect to that particular dispute. However, as I recall, that had gone on over a long period of time, and there was already the stage of mediation taking place over a lengthy period of time. Also, I believe, a contract had run out.

Mr. Speaker, in this particular case, we want to be able to meet with the doctors and ascertain what their current negotiating position is. Quite frankly, we do not want to go by media reports, and we would like to get back to the table to ascertain that.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, is the Minister of Health then saying that he is waiting for the Premier to pick up the phone to Bill Anderson and settle the dispute today? What are you doing about it? It's time to settle it.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have met with our negotiating team. They continue to endeavour to set up a meeting with the Alberta Medical Association. The hon. member says that's not good enough. I cannot understand why, when the parties involved are quite prepared to sit down and negotiate.

THE SPEAKER: The leader of the ND opposition.

Sexual Orientation

(continued)

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased that two-thirds of the government caucus agreed today to follow the Premier's lead and accept the Supreme Court ruling in the Vriend case. However, I am concerned that the government's decision to try to build legislative fences around the decision will only prolong the agony felt by gays and lesbians in this province for at least the next six weeks, if not longer. I wonder if the Premier would clarify something from the news release issued earlier today by the government. Why did it link pedophilia to homosex-

uality when the Premier knows full well that the vast majority of pedophiles are heterosexuals and that pedophilia has nothing to do with equality rights for gays and lesbians?

MR. KLEIN: The only reason that was mentioned in the news release, Mr. Speaker, is that this was one of the issues that has been raised publicly, you know, through information or misinformation. I think we need to look at some of these questions. Again, there is nothing surreptitious about this. These are some of the concerns that have been raised by Albertans. We have a task force in place that will continue to do its work and look at some of these issues.

MS BARRETT: Okay. I'll accept it on face value.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a seven-year roller coaster for a lot of people. I'd like to ask the Premier what he believes is to be gained by these so-called public consultations in such an emotionally charged atmosphere? Can he defend the necessity of this? Why can't it wait?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's just a natural extension of what the caucus did today relative to not invoking the notwithstanding clause. I think we have to address these questions as soon as possible. To bury our heads in the sand and to say that these issues do not exist would be fundamentally and morally wrong. There is a very, very large constituency out there who is concerned about some of these issues, and I think they have to be addressed.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Premier is so determined to hold these additional public consultations, why are they being conducted by a cabinet committee, some of whose ministers have very outspoken opinions on the subject, rather than an impartial body, the impartial body that should be doing it, the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission? [interjections] They did it before.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we would like to look at these situations as a government, and if the ND opposition wants to look at these situations as the third party, they're perfectly entitled to look at these matters. At some point it will come back to our caucus, perhaps to this Legislative Assembly, and we'll have the discussion on it.

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

Educational Consortia

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Education. In 1995 the Department of Education provided a three-year commitment of nearly \$2 million to establish regional consortia to support in-service training and professional development for educators and providers of education. Today I understand that there are six such consortia serving various areas of the province. Now that the initial three-year period has elapsed, what is the minister's evaluation of the consortia in serving the needs of their stakeholders?

2:10

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I have gotten feedback on the success of consortia throughout the province of Alberta. I think that they have done a very fine job in providing in-servicing for new

initiatives like school councils and site-based management. As well, the in-service training has been provided to a wide number of stakeholders, people who have influence in student learning: teachers, school councils, school trustees, and administrators. In the first full year of the implementation of consortia, more than 13,000 people had received in-servicing, and the satisfaction level expressed by participants has been very high. Satisfaction levels for participants are at the 95 percent range. The results of random satisfaction surveys to measure how well consortia are doing have also been consistently high, and the feedback overall has been very positive.

MR. JOHNSON: To the same minister: now that the funding period has elapsed, how will regional consortia be funded in the future?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, at the outset the consortia were designed to operate independently and become self-sustaining with jurisdictions and schools and partner organizations providing their expertise and paying expenses for representatives of consortia boards of directors and providing in-kind services, things like office space and technology support. The funds for the professional development and the curriculum in-service are included in the basic instruction block. As the member indicated, \$2 million was provided for the first three years for infrastructure and in-servicing. Consortia have indicated that they need more time in order to get their own funding in place. Government funding for this program was scheduled to end August 31 of this year. In response to the consortia, who have indicated that they need more time for this transition, we will provide an additional \$800,000 for the 1998-99 year for infrastructure, and consortia will continue to fund their own programs on a self-sustaining basis.

MR. JOHNSON: Finally to the same minister: are all regions of the province served by at least one of these consortia?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, all but two separate school boards currently participate in consortia. I understand that one of those separate school boards is on the verge of signing on but has not yet done so. About 40 funded private schools also access the services of consortia. All school authorities have access to the services of a consortium. So there is very broad support and wide access to this program by stakeholders throughout the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane. [applause]

VLT Plebiscites

MR. WICKMAN: Through you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Premier, in the past you have promised – let me remind you: you have promised – to remove VLTs within seven days of the filing of a successful petition. Not the Gaming and Liquor Commission but you, Mr. Premier. In light of the decision by the highest court of Alberta in regards to the Wood Buffalo petition, will you commit to your original promise and remove the machines now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, indeed it is the policy of this government that when municipalities hold a plebiscite and if the plebiscite is to remove the machines, the resolution would then be forwarded to the Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission, and in accordance with policy the commission would remove the

machines. We cannot tell the commission – it is a quasi-judicial body. Certainly they are aware of the policy. They know the policy, and indeed the policy has been followed in two instances. In the town of Rocky Mountain House and in the town of Sylvan Lake VLTs were indeed removed. They were not removed in the town of Lacombe, where the validity of the plebiscite was challenged and it was ruled that the plebiscite indeed was not valid. Therefore, there might or there might not be another plebiscite. I don't know what the town council there plans to do in Lacombe.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Wood Buffalo, I don't know as of this moment where the resolution of the council is, whether that resolution has been communicated to the commission. If it has, it will be up to the commission to act or to withhold action, pending an application by the appellant to the Supreme Court of Canada. Now, I understand . . . [interjections]

Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the rules are quite clear. Once notification has been received by contract that the machines are to be removed, the seven days' notice has to be served. That is under the contract. So even if we received the notification today, there would still be seven days before the machines are removed. That is the law, and that is a contractual obligation. If there is a subsequent court action, then I think the commission will take a look at that court action and will rule whether it's deemed appropriate in light of the court action to remove the machines.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Premier, let me get this clear. Through you, Mr. Speaker: Mr. Premier, are you now saying that you're prepared to use further pending court action as a stalling device in the removal of these machines?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, I'm not saying that at all. This government does not get involved at that level. We are not going to get involved in any court cases relative to the removal of machines. I understand that the individual, the hotelier who took the case to the Alberta Court of Appeal and lost is now giving consideration to an application to the Supreme Court of Canada to have that case reviewed by the highest court.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, through you to the Premier. Mr. Premier, my last question: will you now do the honourable thing and hold a provincewide plebiscite and deal with this issue once and for all?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I'm glad the hon. member has been keeping up to date on this issue because we've been through it many times in this Legislative Assembly. The Gordon report clearly states – and it was a recommendation that was accepted – that this whole matter of gambling would be reviewed by the end of August 1998. That review is now taking place, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to VLTs as well as all other forms of gambling. Really, the culmination of this review will take place near the end of this month in Medicine Hat when we convene a summit and bring all parties together relative to the issue of gambling, including the issue of VLTs. Hopefully, we'll be able to frame some recommendations coming out of that meeting and take whatever action then is deemed to be appropriate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Public Service Salaries

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today

is to the minister responsible for the personnel administration office. As we all know, the government is currently in contract negotiations with over 20,000 members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. Will the minister please update the House on the status of these negotiations?

MR. DUNFORD: I'd be glad to, Mr. Speaker. First, let me start, though, by indicating that we acknowledge that the Alberta public service contributed very significantly to this province's fiscal success, and those efforts deserve to be rewarded. I'm pleased to report to the House today that government employees have recently ratified a master agreement that covers issues such as hours of work, working conditions, and the return of three unpaid holidays. In addition, seven of 12 bargaining subsidiaries have ratified deals for an additional 2.3 percent effective September 1, 1997, and 2.25 percent effective September 1, 1998. Those subsidiary agreements also include an achievement bonus of 2 percent for employees, which will be included in their April paycheques. I'd like to assure the House that negotiations are progressing with the remaining bargaining subsidiaries.

2:20

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: since the government is making progress with its unionized employees, can the minister inform the House about the new compensation program brought forward today for non-union employees?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that ensuring a public service management compensation program that is flexible and market driven was one of the key recommendations, as we all recall, from the Alberta Growth Summit. So the new management reward strategy follows through on that recommendation by focusing compensation on goals set in the ministry business plans. Now, this is the key reason the government brought forward the concept of achievement bonuses in the February budget. The new compensation package for government managers focuses on ensuring that we will be able to retain, attract, and develop the talent and employees required to serve the needs of Albertans into the next century.

MRS. TARCHUK: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the same minister. Earlier today the minister tabled a report on compensation for deputy ministers. Can the minister inform the House if he plans on implementing all of the recommendations of the report?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, last fall I did ask a private-sector committee to make recommendations regarding compensation levels for deputy ministers and other senior government officials. As mentioned, I did table that report today in the House. The committee was asked to examine the question of appropriate compensation, to compare compensation levels with other jurisdictions, and to make recommendations on salary levels for senior officials. The government will be studying the committee's recommendations and a decision regarding senior officials' pay will be made in the next little while.

THE SPEAKER: Ooh, it sounds to me like the Easter bunny's arrived.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

School Achievement Tests

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A private company has listed 75 schools, many of which, year after year, do poorly on Alberta achievement tests. These schools, coincidentally, are located in low-income areas of the province, in parts of Edmonton, the Northern Lights and the Northland school divisions. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What responsibility does the minister take for the continued poor performance of these schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would be the first one to agree with the hon. member if he said that the objective of the Department of Education was to improve all of these schools. It has to be noted that the Department of Education, this government, does not as a policy endorse the ranking of schools. That is not the purpose of achievement tests. The purpose of achievement tests is to be able to identify those areas where we have weaknesses and challenges to face and come up with solutions for fixing those problems.

The 75 schools that are referred to in this private report that is put out by an individual – frankly, I think the school boards are concerned about the performance of these schools, but they're dealing with it positively. They recognize the challenges that they have. They know there are some difficulties they'll have to deal with. But those school boards are doing a good job of identifying those problems and putting the solutions in place. Obviously, the solution is not to lower the standards that our schools are expected to achieve but rather to ensure that more schools can jump over the bar. We want every school in this province to succeed, Mr. Speaker.

DR. MASSEY: My question, then, is to the same minister. If ranking isn't the purpose of the achievement tests, why are the scores made public?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, you know, on the one hand the opposition would have us release information pursuant to FOIP, and on the other hand they would have us suppress it. You cannot have it both ways. These achievement tests are done partly as an accountability measure, partly as a way of identifying difficulties and challenges. Obviously this information must be public.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Again, to this same minister: given that testing these students year after year is like taking a patient's temperature over and over again without treating the underlying illness, what is the minister doing? Exactly what are you going to do about the problem?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the analogy presented by this hon. member is not an appropriate analogy because in his analogy he's assuming that these schools aren't improving. In fact, we do want to see a pattern of improvement over time. It would be a good idea to measure the temperature of a patient from time to time to monitor whether or not the treatment you're giving is in fact working. That's what's happening with schools. We are employing new ways, dealing with new solutions of how to deal with problems. For example, the early literacy program: if that's identified as an issue on grade 3 achievement tests, then the introduction of an early literacy program should help improve the results in grade 3 literacy. If it doesn't, then we'll have to go

back to the drawing board and find out what kind of a program will work.

It's absolutely appropriate that from year to year we measure results, because parents want to know, regardless of the type of program that a school board or a school uses for teaching children, that their kids are learning the material. How we know that they've learned is through achievement tests on an annual basis.

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

Used Oil Management

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past couple of months several constituents have expressed their concern to me regarding the cost and fees charged to them for oil, oil containers and filters, and for oil changes at their local garage. To the Minister of Environmental Protection: can you please explain the purpose behind the development of the Alberta Used Oil Management Association and what's expected to be achieved by that association?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, this initiative came from the industry. AUOMA was formed by the industry, and of course industry recognizes the importance of protecting the environment. They recognized that there were some 32 million litres of used oil that disappeared in the province each year. That's equivalent to one of the supertankers, so it's a lot of oil. Now, of course a large portion of that is consumed, but there is a lot of it that is thrown out and wasted. It is a renewable resource that we should be recycling.

As well as that, there's a very large volume of oil containers and filters that end up in the landfill, so the industry came forward with a proposal that would see those different products brought back and recycled where they can be. In the case of the filters they will be broken down and the material used for new products.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents also have questions regarding the reason they do not receive a refund when they return oil filters and used oil to the appropriate recycling station.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I think it's unfair to compare this particular program with the deposit/return system we use for bottles. When they brought the proposal forward, I did ask them that very same question. It was interesting. They were really concerned relative to the oil that in fact if there was a return, there would be a temptation to use solvents or other materials to mix with the oil to increase the quantity, and that could render the oil unusable.

As to the containers and the filters, to set up another system and track the money and actually have it paid back out again adds a very large administrative cost. So the fact is that there's going to be an attempt to see, through education, if we can't get the program to work without the return.

2:30

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there's been no change in the behaviour of some people with respect to getting rid of their used containers and filters, does the minister have any mechanism in place to prevent this and achieve the objective; namely, to lessen pollution?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, before we implemented the program – and incidentally, the only involvement of government was to pass a regulation that put in motion the charge. This, as I said earlier, was an industry-driven initiative. We believe – and we got this information from the six sites that were demonstration sites prior to the implementation of the program provincewide – that through education and awareness in fact we will see the recovery increase. There are currently about 200 sites in the province that accept oil. There are some 50 sites that will be bottle depots, ecocentres, so you can take your bottles, oil, and containers all to one location, but there are some other locations that just accept the oil, oil filters, and containers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Support for Municipalities

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Municipal Affairs has totally ignored the Growth Summit and has passed the buck to yet another committee. Well, Madam Minister, your new committee just doesn't cut it. Even after years of cuts and sacrifices both Edmonton and Calgary have made it clear that property taxes still must go up. My questions are to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why do committees come first and taxpayers second?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, they don't come first and taxpayers second. I'm totally unclear on what the hon. member is referencing.

MR. GIBBONS: My second question: what was the point of inviting the municipalities to the Growth Summit if you're going to reject their recommendations?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I think there's clear evidence that our government hasn't rejected their recommendations. As I repeated earlier this week, our Premier is chairing a task force on infrastructure. We're working diligently with municipalities and their associations to resolve those issues. We're examining the impact of education and property taxes in those high-growth areas which have had large increases for taxpayers. We have provided dollars this year for assessors and assessment methodology so that we can improve by \$5 million the grants to municipalities to help them offset the costs that are being maintained and claimed as a result of the assessments and the move to market value assessments.

Probably the most outstanding thing we have done, with the participation of both rural and urban municipalities, is engage in intermunicipal seminars on planning. We've gone to regions throughout the province on five different occasions and had huge response from people who are working to become more co-operative, more together in their planning, collaborative, sharing their resources.

Mr. Speaker, I hear far fewer complaints from municipalities than I do from the hon. members.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, my last question is to the same minister. Why does the government continue to encourage increases in property taxes with another 40 percent cut in municipal assistance?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to again address the matter of what the business of Municipal Affairs is. We engage throughout

the province in assuring that assessments are as accurate as possible. We do not advocate tax increases. We do not maintain in any way that people should be increasing taxes, but we recognize and respond responsibly to those people who recognize that they have needs in their community, and we acknowledge that they have taken action that's appropriate to benefit their own ratepayers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Farm Fuel

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The president of the Alberta Sod Growers Association has contacted me as well as other sod farmers in my constituency. They are concerned that they have recently lost their right to use farm fuel to haul their products to market. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. Can the minister advise if this is in fact the case?

MR. DAY: Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker: yes and no. The way the issue has developed, it was never actually the policy of the government that the sod farmers would be able to use the exempt fuel. To clarify it but also to help them in terms of transporting their product on their own property and doing their work on their own land, it was put in regulation that they were able to use the exempt fuel on their own land, but it was very clear in the regulation that they could not use exempt fuel if they were out on the highway and hauling to a consumer, either retail or wholesale.

What happened was a particular producer became, I think, creative – and I'll use that in the proper entrepreneurial sense – and actually struck a lease agreement with a retailer, leasing the land around that retail operation. Then the sod farmer was able to truck the product down the highway and actually to the retailer, but the farmer was leasing the land. So then he said, "That's actually my land, and I'm allowed to travel on my own land," et cetera. It went to a court case, and the court case determined that the regulation needed to be changed to really make it clear that it would only be actually on their own existing land. So it never was a policy, but some creative entrepreneurial spirit took over, and it began to happen in practice.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary is to the same minister. It is my understanding that most Alberta sod farmers had reacted to the court case by getting farm plates on their trucks and using farm fuel. Why is it that sod farmers were not made aware of the upcoming changes?

MR. DAY: Actually, Mr. Speaker, we were not aware that following the case sod farmers began to do this as a matter of practice. It was indicated at the time to the industry that because of the court case, as soon as the Fuel Tax Act came up for revision, in fact the regulation would be made very clear and that practice would come to an end. That act didn't come up for revision until this year, so it sounds like over time just because of an absence of statement on it, more and more of the sod farmers actually began in practice to do this.

MR. SEVERTSON: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary is to the same minister. Sod farmers typically sign contracts a year in advance and can't change the pricing that they have set. They are

now caught in the squeeze because they thought they qualified for the use of farm fuel. Will the minister consider relief for these farmers so they will not lose?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has been doing some good work on this, pretty aggressively I might add, and hasn't given me any rest on it. I've had officials actually check the situation and look at the implication, even if there are any implications on the budget process. My feeling is that he makes a valid point on behalf of the industry, that rather than pointing a finger of right or wrong or who should have communicated what, the fact is that these particular producers have purchased fuel and do have some long-term contracts based on the fact that they thought they were going to receive this benefit. So the member can announce to that industry that we will put a moratorium on our plans for this year in terms of the benefit. The producers will continue to enjoy that benefit for this year. We'll immediately start a consultation process with them to see what the implications will be for '99. I don't want them making long-term contracts now, but for this year we'll put that moratorium in place.

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

Long-term Care

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While this government hides its inaction behind task forces, seniors in this province are ending up in long-term care facilities far away from their spouses, from their families, and from their friends. Seniors and their families are told that there are seamless boundaries between health regions, but the reality is that seniors from Morinville, who should be placed in St. Albert or Westlock, are being sent off to Mayerthorpe, an hour and a half away. Just last week the Minister of Health was suggesting that seniors from Peace River should be placed in long-term care beds in McLennan. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Is it government policy that a husband, wife, or child should have to travel two or three hours to give care and comfort to a loved one in a long-term care facility far away, like Peace River to McLennan or Morinville to Mayerthorpe?

2:40

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the overall policy of most of the regional health authorities is to have seniors as close to their family and home as possible. In terms of overall planning, most of them also do use a first-available-bed policy in terms of someone who's been in acute care being transferred to a long-term care facility. Then as soon as possible and there are opportunities to transfer, they work the person back to their home community. I've found, examining this issue, that it is working, and seniors do get back to their home area.

Now, we should be very clear, Mr. Speaker, because I think there has been a misleading reference made with respect to the Peace River situation. Yes, some weeks ago the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services and myself did tour five hospitals in total in the Peace River country, and we were looking at the long-term care pressures in Peace River. Now, our observation was that there was capacity, that there were a number of beds available in McLennan. McLennan is about a half-hour drive from Peace River, as I understand it. The other thing is that we were advised that a number of the residents in Peace River are

actually from the Keeweenaw regional health authority and from the High Prairie area and the area east of McLennan. So we thought it might be logical for those people to be in McLennan rather than in Peace River.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that these policies aren't working because there aren't enough beds in the right places, I'd like to know what the minister is going to do right now to make sure that families can be closer together.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I just went through an example that I think the hon. member was not portraying quite correctly. That is that there are beds available close to the residences or the sites that we were discussing. The observation we made was that, yes, there was an opportunity to move people closer to their home communities.

Now, with respect to the overall system, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, yes, we do have an aging population, and we have a long-term care review committee that's working on long-term planning. We do have our health authorities with a policy for getting seniors back to their preferred location. Yes, it also does take some time in some cases because we have to work through the capacity of the number of beds that are available in the system.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. When will the minister instruct each health authority to stop discriminating against long-term care patients who live outside of their RHA's boundaries? WestView and Aspen cannot even get on the Capital list. They can't even get on the list.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if a person is resident in the Aspen health authority, it would seem logical to me that they would make their first effort to locate people within the Aspen region. I'm quite aware of the Aspen region and have had some first-hand experience in this area over the past number of months. They do endeavour and I think they are finding beds for their long-term care patients. I agree that they follow the first-available-bed policy, but they do make a conscious effort to move people back to their preferred location.

head: **Members' Statements**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we'll begin Members' Statements in 30 seconds from now in this order: first of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. So in 30 seconds from now I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Wong Family Centennial

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, one of my constituents, Jim Wong, brought to my attention the wonderful occasion of his family celebrating their 101st anniversary in Alberta. Given the family's strong connection to the Olds area, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and I cast lots for the privilege of giving this statement, and I'm pleased to be speaking this afternoon.

In 1897, Wong Yet, an adventuresome young man from Taishan county in south China, embarked on a long sea voyage to Canada, known as the land of the golden mountain. He settled in the tiny prairie hamlet of Olds in the North West Territories. Wong Yet was a hardworking, frugal man with an instinct that this region held promise for his family and future generations. He

started a hand laundry, which flourished, and in 1903 summoned his son, Wong Pond, to join him. Together they expanded the laundry to include a restaurant and bakery that became the gathering place for local farmers, ranchers, and merchants. Wong Yet was known fondly as Daddy Wong.

Wong Pond founded the Public Lunch Cafe in 1918, which is still in operation today. The building is a candidate for replication in Calgary's Heritage Park for inclusion as a typical prairie Chinese restaurant. In 1922, Wong Pond's son Frank arrived from China, and together they added a theatre, billiards hall, and barbershop to the restaurant business. Frank married Irene Won, a school teacher from Victoria, B.C., and they raised five children. Like Wong Yet and Wong Pond, Frank and his family were active in the Olds and district community. Frank Wong earned a solid reputation for integrity and honesty throughout the region.

Frank passed away in 1996, and a trust fund for the Olds hospital was established in his memory. Irene Wong, now 94, continues to live at the family home in Olds.

The 101 years have passed quickly. Alberta has changed from a desolate prairie territory to a thriving, multifaceted province. The Wong family thank their forefathers for having the courage and vision to come to Alberta and for providing them with the opportunity to prove that Canada is indeed the land of the golden mountain.

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

National Wildlife Week

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, this is National Wildlife Week. This week focuses our attention on one of the most important natural resources: wildlife. Alberta is fortunate to still have a few relatively unspoiled areas of our province where woodland caribou, wood buffalo, and grizzly bears can roam and the odd wild Tory.

Human pressures are breaking these areas into smaller and smaller pieces. Seismic lines, roads to oil and gas wells, and logging dissect the landscape in even remote areas, often opening the way for more human traffic and disturbance from hikers, hunters, and all-terrain vehicles.

Protecting the natural habitat is essential if we are to protect the rich diversity of wildlife that we still have in Alberta. The government has its special places program that is intended to do this. In many cases, these so-called protected areas allow too many competing activities that will inevitably affect the wildlife populations. The government has set up a committee to work on protecting our endangered species. That committee consists mainly of those who use the land rather than wildlife experts, who know and understand the needs of the endangered species. We must not wait until a species is on the vulnerable or endangered list before taking action. By then it may be too late, for once their habitat is gone, there is nowhere for these animals to live.

We have seen the effect of human pressures on our fish populations. People warned the government years ago that better management was needed to protect our fish stocks. Recently I received a list of 150 Alberta lakes that show that the walleye stocks have collapsed in about a quarter of them and were vulnerable in another quarter. How many years will it take for those fish stocks to recover? Wouldn't it have been better to take action earlier to limit fishing and protect spawning areas? I think attention to the protection of spawning habitat is particularly important this year when National Wildlife Week has as its focus

to protect our shorelines. But the lesson we must learn from this situation with walleye, northern pike, and other fish is that we must not make the same mistakes with all of our animals.

I would like to commend the work of those who fight to protect our wildlife and their natural habitats and ask the government to work with them.

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

2:50

J.R. Shaw

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each year four people are named to the Canadian Business Hall of Fame. On April 1, 1998, Calgary J.R. Shaw, chairman and chief executive officer of Shaw Communications Inc., was inducted into the Canadian Business Hall of Fame. Founded by Junior Achievement in 1979, this award recognizes outstanding Canadian entrepreneurs. Chosen for his vision, standard of excellence, and contribution to Canada's prosperity, J.R. Shaw is an inspiration to all Albertans.

J.R., as he is fondly known, is the chairman and chief executive officer of Shaw Communications. The cable and communications company he founded in 1966 now serves an estimated 20 percent of the Canadian cable and television market. J.R. built a small family business into a true western success story. A diversified Canadian communications company, Shaw provides electronic link to millions of people through cable television, telecommunications, high-speed Internet access, paging, special television programming networks, radio, satellite and digital delivery of music.

The Shaw name is well known, but I'd like to highlight two programs that we should focus on. Shaw Communications has been a leader in the YTV programming, which has capitalized on Canada's reputation in children's television. It also has an innovative partnership with Access TV in developing and delivering postsecondary educational programs and opportunities.

I ask the Members of this Legislative Assembly to join me in congratulating a Calgary, J.R. Shaw, a 1998 member of the Canadian Business Hall of Fame.

head: **Projected Government Business**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would now call upon the Deputy Government House Leader to share with the Assembly the projected government business for the week following our break.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to advise the House that on Monday, April 20, after 1:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for second reading we anticipate dealing with Bill 35, presuming we don't complete dealing with it today, Bill 39, Bill 41, Bill 21, and Bill 38, and then as per the Order Paper. After 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of the Whole: Bill 25, Bill 35, Bill 39, Bill 41, Bill 21, Bill 38, and Bill 27, and then as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, April 21, after 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for third reading: bills 20, 23, 28, 29, 30, 33, 36, 24, 13, and then as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders we would anticipate proceeding with bills 2, 37, and 27.

On Wednesday, April 22, at 8 p.m. and on Thursday, April 23, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders we would anticipate proceeding as per the Order Paper: on Wednesday, Committee of the Whole, and on Thursday, third reading and Committee of the Whole.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Private Bills**
head: **Third Reading**

Bill Pr. 3
Alberta Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 1998

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, the Alberta Wheat Pool Amendment Act, 1998.

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

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

Bill 40
Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 1998

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 40, the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, and to speak briefly to it.

The bill, although short in length, I think is an important bill, not important in the sense that it will have a great impact on people's day-to-day lives but important for what it says about Alberta's views on Canada and the role they see Alberta playing in Confederation. As all members of this Assembly will agree, Albertans care deeply about our country, and nowhere was this more evident than during our consultations on the Calgary declaration. Albertans appreciate that Canada has a privileged place in the family of nations and that what Canadians have accomplished together is truly remarkable. Importantly, however, they also believe that Canada can be improved, that the operation of our federal system can be made more effective. Albertans probably more than most Canadians have demonstrated a creative ability to think of new ways of doing things and to devise constructive alternatives to the political status quo.

One of those constructive ideas was and is the reform of Canada's Senate. Albertans were pioneers of the idea of a triple E Senate and leaders in pursuit of the constitutional changes necessary to make it a reality. In 1989 Alberta conducted the very first election of a nominee to the Senate and in 1990 saw the successful candidate, Stan Waters, become the only Senator in Canada's history to have an electoral mandate from the people that he was appointed to represent.

Albertans have made it clear to the government that they do not want Stan Waters to become a historical footnote. Rather, they want to continue to democratically elect people who are to represent their interests in the institutions of government. One would think that this desire would be easily understood and widely accepted. Unfortunately, it is not a desire the federal government has been willing to honour. This refusal to act on Albertans' clearly expressed desire naturally leads me into a discussion of the

purposes of the amendments which are before the Legislature.

When the Senatorial Selection Act was introduced in 1989, the act was premised on the existence of a formal federal commitment made at the Meech Lake negotiations. The parties agreed to appoint Senators based on lists of provincial nominees until such time as agreement on Senate reform was achieved. Alberta seized on this opportunity to push the question of Senate reform forward by choosing to elect its list of nominees. While the federal government of the day was not happy about the government's actions, they were eventually compelled to accede to the wishes of Albertans. With the failure of the Meech Lake accord, however, there is no longer any federal commitment to appoint Senators from provincial lists.

As indefensible as the present Senate is, the expiry of the Meech Lake commitment has allowed the federal government to fall back on the practice of Prime Ministerial appointments. Whenever a vacancy has opened in the Senate, Premier Klein has reiterated the province's position in favour of electing our Senate nominees. Inevitably, the federal response is a polite brush-off and a quick appointment of a new Senator.

It is the practice of rapid appointments that is the first target of the proposed amendments to the Senatorial Selection Act. In choosing to fill Alberta's Senate vacancies rapidly, the Prime Minister has denied Albertans even the opportunity to consider making their own selection for who should represent Alberta in the Senate. Accordingly, the first change that has been proposed to the legislation is to amend the act to allow for the election of nominees whether or not a vacancy actually exists. This would allow Albertans to select their nominee to the Senate. The Prime Minister would then have a much more difficult choice: either to appoint Alberta's duly elected nominee or to directly overrule Alberta's choice of a Senator with his own patronage appointment.

The second objective of Bill 40 also arises out of the different circumstances that currently exist compared to the situation in 1989. In 1989 the province had a fair degree of confidence that the federal government would appoint the eventual winner of a Senate election. By definition, a vacancy existed that needed to be filled, and the federal government was committed to naming someone suggested by the province. While the federal government could stall on filling the vacancy, which it did, eventually the pressure to fill the vacancy with the elected nominee was irresistible.

Now, however, we are amending the act to allow for nominees to be elected potentially years in advance of an actual vacancy. We are also faced with a Prime Minister who has a track record of ignoring the desire of Albertans in this regard to the point where a successful nominee may not be appointed to the Senate for a long time, if ever. As a result, we are building in an option which would allow the province to provide financial support to successful nominees for the time between their election and their appointment to the Senate. A key to exercising this option will be to define exactly what the province expects of a Senate nominee to ensure that Albertans receive value for the money spent.

This is new territory for Alberta. When Stan Waters was elected, no role of office was defined, nor was financial support offered.

If this course of action is chosen, a great deal of thought and reflection will be required before regulations are enacted. I stress again that these provisions only enable the government to pass regulations providing support in appropriate circumstances. They do not commit the government to doing so. In the event of a change of heart by the federal government, Alberta could still

hold Senate elections as vacancies arose, with the expectation that nominees would be quickly appointed to the Senate with no need for support.

3:00

The third objective of the bill is to make sure that the electoral machinery established in the Senatorial Selection Act remains in good working order. As a result of our review of the legislation a number of housekeeping amendments have been made to ensure that references to other acts remain current and that all of the relevant acts operate smoothly together.

The one substantive change arising from this review was an amendment to place the timing of a Senate election on the same footing as the timing of municipal elections. This is only, of course, in the event that the province chooses to hold a Senate election in conjunction with provincewide municipal elections. Making the Senatorial Selection Act consistent with municipal practices will ease the concerns expressed by some municipalities during the 1989 election.

The final objective of Bill 40 is to extend the life of the act until December 31, 2004. I believe a sunset clause is still appropriate for this legislation, because we must allow for the possibility that Alberta's long campaign for Senate reform will eventually succeed. By 2004 there is a chance that we will have accomplished satisfactory Senate reform. If not, the clause will provide us with an opportunity to review our strategy and to review our legislation and options again.

With those introductory comments, Mr. Speaker, I would look forward to listening to other views of members of this Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. The Senatorial Selection Amendment Act is another one of those bills that the government brings forward for very little apparent reason other than to pick a fight with somebody, and in this case it would be the federal government.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs was very accurate when he said that Albertans have been at the forefront of the fight for a reformed Senate. In fact, it was one Albertan in particular that I can recall, a former colleague of mine by the name of Nick Taylor, who gave that issue particular profile in this Assembly and was instrumental in the law that was created in 1989 which led to the eventual election of Stan Waters and then the appointment of that nominee to the Red Chamber. So there can be no misunderstanding where the commitment of the Alberta Liberal Party is to meaningful Senate reform. It's only in that context that I want to make the following comments.

The three Es that the minister referred to are equal, effective, and then elected. Those three Es are like the three legs of a tripod. Taken together they build a sturdy foundation upon which Senate reform can take place. But if you take out any one of those legs of the tripod, what you're left with is a very shaky foundation indeed, something that ultimately will be unsupportable. It makes no sense to get out of step or out of sequence and simply hold an election without making sure that all of the other components, the other two legs of the tripod, are fixed firmly in place. If we want to work for a meaningful, effective, responsible, and responsive Senate, then we should be doing that in concert with the other political jurisdictions in this country. We should not be doing it by waving a red flag and taunting some other government to do something else.

Now, the minister of intergovernmental affairs mentioned that we have a Prime Minister who has been singularly unresponsive. I don't know on what grounds he bases that. I do not recall the Premier of Alberta standing up and saying: here's a list of appointees, Mr. Prime Minister; please choose from our list. I don't remember the Premier of Alberta saying: hold it; we want to have an election first. In fact, that didn't happen. We've had three appointments from Alberta to the Senate, and in not one of those cases was there a challenge from the province of Alberta. So this is an untested theory on the part of the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs that we have an unresponsive Prime Minister.

I happen to think that we have a very responsive, responsible, and democratically elected Prime Minister that enjoys the support of most Canadians from coast to coast to coast, including Albertans. So we certainly can't make this the Prime Minister's fault, and I think you shouldn't be pointing fingers too far afield here. I think the minister might be able to point fingers a little bit closer to home, because Alberta has had the ability to work cooperatively since the demise of Meech Lake with the other provinces and the federal government to ensure that there will be meaningful Senate reform.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Bill 40, as I started my comments, is one of those slogan bills that the government wants to wave around to make it look like they're doing something. In fact, what they're doing is using Bill 40 as a smoke screen to sort of obscure some of the issues at home. They want Albertans not to be thinking about municipal downloading. They want Albertans not to be thinking about potentials for conflicts of interest in livestock identification. They want Albertans not to be thinking about Bill 27. They want Albertans not to be thinking about labour unrest. They want Albertans not to be thinking about the Human Rights Commission. They want Albertans not to be thinking about the courts. They want Albertans not to be thinking about obscenely high tuition rates. They don't want Albertans to think about any of those things. They want Albertans to be thinking about senatorial elections, standby prophylactic senatorial elections. They want the people of Alberta to rise up and rush to a balloting place and hold an election for a position that does not exist and participate in an election process that has no force in law.

They would then suggest that once Albertans flocked to the balloting places to hold such a meaningless election, the taxpayers of Alberta should not just pay for that process, which would be millions of dollars, but should subsequently pay for those winners of the electoral lottery, who would then be flown at taxpayers' expense to Ottawa, put up no doubt in first-class hotels, and be paid to drink tea while they watch from the gallery what the real Senators are doing, just waiting for a vacancy. And they said normal doesn't live in Alberta anymore.

I would suggest that there is little justification for the senatorial standby election act or whatever it is the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs is calling Bill 40. There is little justification for it. What we should be doing instead is putting ourselves firmly on the path towards real Senate reform. And we can do that. We will march hand in hand with this government. As wrong-minded as they have been in the past, we would be willing to work with them in the future to ensure a meaningful role for the Senate and Senators. We would be hoping that the government is not serious about this flawed plan, and we would be hoping that Bill 40 will soon find its place in the dustheap of legislation that other bills that have originated in this session have ended up in.

Mr. Speaker, the issue isn't whether or not there should be a

reformed Senate; there should be. The issue isn't whether or not elections can be part of that reform, because they may well be. The issue is whether or not we should have a piece of legislation that cannot compel another jurisdiction to do anything, that can give only false promise to Albertans who may believe, who may be somehow convinced that the government is actually doing something meaningful, and whether or not we should try to perpetuate this . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: Reality.

MR. SAPERS: Falsehood. Thank you, Mr. Minister. That's the most polite word.

. . . this falsehood on the people of Alberta. I say that we should not. I would say that no member of the Official Opposition will participate in perpetuating such a falsehood. I would ask that the government reconsider this rather ill-conceived plan. The issue needs to clearly be focused, and that issue is the need for meaningful Senate reform, not this single leg of the tripod being implemented out of step with the rest of what might in fact result in meaningful reform.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, I will also note in my concluding statements, would really only be given life until the year 2004. That would be a good thing. It's a start. What we may be forced to do is bring in an amendment at some point if it looks like the government won't see its way clear to do the right thing and just let this bill die, as it should. We might be forced to do something like move an amendment that says that the bill would only be in force, let's say, until April 21, 1998, or something like that.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It might not pass either.

3:10

MR. SAPERS: Well, the minister of transportation is advising that it might not pass, and I know that he is speaking about the bill and not my proposed amendment. I applaud him for that and will be looking forward to his support in helping to defeat this government initiative.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 40.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion by the hon. Government House Leader to adjourn the debate, all those members in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

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

[Debate adjourned April 7: Ms Blakeman speaking]

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was able to get a

few minutes into the comments that I wanted to make on Bill 35 in second reading. At this point I should correct an omission that I made when I was speaking the other day. I omitted to mention that the University of Lethbridge does deliver a bachelor of management program here in Edmonton. Therefore, I can add the University of Lethbridge to the list of postsecondary institutions in Edmonton-Centre.

When we examine this bill and the idea of a 30 percent cap on the tuition for postsecondary institutions, I think we have to ask ourselves what our priorities are. Is our priority a well-educated, well-balanced, healthy society? Is our priority people before money? I don't think this bill satisfies any of those things. I think this bill is about money, or cash, before quality of life. I think it's about money before our youth and their better education.

You often hear an argument about intergenerational debt, that we have to cut all of our services now and reduce our debt and our deficit so we don't pass any of this on to the next generation. Frankly, I think that debt has already been passed on to the next generation, and through measures like a 30 percent cap on postsecondary institutions we have created almost instantaneous debt for any of our young people either considering postsecondary education or graduating from a postsecondary institution.

The amount of the student loans or the student debt – I think other people have spoken of the exact figures, but I know that the loan debt a student could graduate with from a postsecondary education was averaging out at \$25,000. I don't think many of the people in this Chamber, those who did graduate from a postsecondary education, graduated with a \$25,000 debt. That is an enormous burden to start your career with. I believe that through measures such as this, intergenerational debt has been transferred immediately and unfairly onto the next generation of educated people, to whom we look to start a career, to advance through the world, and frankly to become our leaders so that when we in this Chamber are hopefully enjoying our retirement, we have a well-educated, well-balanced, healthy group of people who are the leaders when we are in retirement. I don't know how that is supposed to happen with this.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

How long do you think it's going to take somebody who's graduating with a \$25,000 debt in their early 20s to work that debt off? They are going to have a lower earning power in those early days. They are able to make less significant payments on a loan. How long will they have to wait to start a family, if that's important to them and they want to have money saved towards that, or to buy a house so then they can be paying property taxes and contributing back into the cycle of taxation here? I think this cripples the early years of young adulthood with a heavy debt load.

I'm asking the sponsor of the bill, who is the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development, to reconsider this. I truly believe that this is not a helpful way to go at it, and I truly question the priorities of the minister and of the government. Are these their priorities then? Is this where they want to go? I understand that this government feels that a user-pay system is important, but I also hear them talking about investment and about long-term investment, and I think that's what education is about. I don't believe that burdening people with enormous tuition costs and probable debt upon graduation is a positive long-term investment.

I think there's a second side to that coin, and that is the side

that precludes people from considering postsecondary education. I know it has caused some young people that I know and have spoken to serious consideration about whether they're even going to consider a postsecondary education, and that I find really . . .

MR. DUNFORD: What did you advise them?

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I don't know how to advise young people about that. I feel that I was very lucky, but I cannot advise someone to incur that kind of debt load. I'm having trouble with that.

So we have students who are considering whether or not they even want to get involved in a postsecondary education because they're afraid of how much it's going to cost them. I think one of the things I value most about Alberta and Canada is that, up until now anyway, the thought of a postsecondary education was not too far beyond the reach of almost any young person in this province or in this country, but I think we've hit the point where it is beyond them.

Another point is that with the 30 percent cap it's an open-ended deal. We're saying, "Go for the 30 percent now," but is 30 percent now . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, just a moment.

Hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities, I'll be glad to recognize you after the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre. I'd dearly love to encourage everyone to take their conversations outside, but I think probably some whips might get very upset with the Speaker for doing so. So I would ask that we let the hon. member who has the floor speak.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am delighted that there is such interest in the debate and in the long-term prospects for our young people in Alberta.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: We were talking about a 30 percent cap and the fact that this is essentially an open-ended deal in that a 30 percent cap this year might turn out to be a \$3,000 tuition, but without any defining parameters around that, 30 percent two years from now could be \$5,000 or \$10,000 because there's no end cap on it. It's simply 30 percent of the net of what the university requires. I think that is unwise and unfair.

3:20

I know the minister has heard some protests from students, and I won't go on on that. But I'd like the minister to think and to respond to me about the situation students are getting themselves into where, in order to keep their student loan costs down, they're working more part-time work while they're in university or postsecondary education. Sorry; I always mean to include all of the postsecondary institutions as I'm speaking here. So they're having to work more part-time work to subsidize and to keep their loans down. Perhaps in some cases or perhaps all the time – the minister could probably inform me – they may have to take longer to complete their degree. That in turn, it strikes me, can mean they've got a longer time that they're having to go back and apply for loans, and they're incurring more debt as a student and perhaps more debt for their family if their family is able to support them.

The other thing is that in some faculties students are not allowed to work. They're told, "You must concentrate; you must complete this degree within a certain amount of time." They don't have the opportunity to work, or the amount they can work is very limited. Perhaps they can only work on weekends and not at all at night.

MRS. SOETAERT: And they have to study.

MS BLAKEMAN: And they have to study. So they're not able to earn as much money. They're perhaps not able to earn any additional money to assist themselves throughout the year.

I don't know about the other members in the Chamber, but when I went to university, I was in a faculty that specifically precluded me from working while I was taking courses. When I look back now, I don't know how I could possibly do this. I mean, I didn't come from a well-to-do family by any means, and I managed to peg things together to get through it. But if that is making me hesitate, in looking back, about whether or not I could have made it through postsecondary education – and my parents are teachers; education was really important to them – then how many other students are we discouraging from pursuing this? I don't want to paint a really dark and cloudy future out there, but I think we need to seriously consider whether this is the message we want to be sending out, whether this is really where our priority lies. I believe that education is an investment, and I do look to the government to be providing the foundation for that education, both K to 12 and postsecondary education.

Those are the points that I really wanted to make in second reading on this bill. I do not think it's a good idea. I'm sure the minister will be up to answer some of the points I've raised, but it strikes me that yet again the government is making a choice to put money or the need for them to make money or reimburse themselves with money before what is truly good for Albertans in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this, and I appreciate the enthusiasm that it's been met with.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just have a couple of comments to make on this particular piece of legislation. I recognize that the hon. member is committed to a tuition cap, but it's a black cap that he's committed to, a black cap of 30 percent. It's very black. I know the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre didn't want to cast doom and gloom, but that was a black cap, with 30 percent on it.

I believe that our students now are taking on as much work as they can and as many courses as they can. As a matter of fact, many students are cutting back on the number of courses they're taking in order to work more, which means they're staying in university longer. It's taking longer to achieve a four-year degree as a result of having to work more.

We notice that the tuition in this province has continued to rise. We can compare the average tuition of about \$3,300 here in this province to that on the coast of about \$2,100 at Simon Fraser, in that area, and about \$2,200 at U of Vic, in that area. I wonder why here we are in a tremendous economic situation in this province, where it is much cheaper to live and our economy is much better and we have a tremendous number of opportunities for graduates, but in a province where the economy is very much

a black problem, they can still offer tuition fees that are about \$1,000 a year lower than ours. So I wonder if the balance is here, if they're looking at the need to ensure that as many students as possible get a postsecondary education without having to compromise some of those students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and from environments where there's not a tremendous amount of money available. They're making it far more affordable.

We also have to look at the future, and this province is blessed with having, as I said, a tremendous economic situation. [interjections] Well, we're not going to go that far. The minister of transportation wants me to say that the minister of advanced education is blessed. Well, maybe on Sundays. Easter Sunday.

However, I think it's very important to note that we have a shortage of highly technically skilled students and people coming out of the technical colleges. There's a shortage of people who can operate within the global environment. That's going to get bigger, but it's going to get more expensive to get our students to that point, and I'm wondering where it's going to stop. I'm wondering: from the minister's perspective on this, is 30 percent where it's going to stop? Or are we now going to have regulations so we can go to 33 percent, 34 percent, 35 percent? Where does it really stop for the government? Twenty percent seems pretty good.

MRS. SOETAERT: Affordable, realistic.

MS OLSEN: It is very realistic, and it's realistic for students. They won't have to work as many part-time jobs. I think every student I've talked to is working and is working more often than they want, as I've said before. We know that the average net debt for students has grown from \$6,000 to \$16,000 from 1987 to 1995. That's a tremendous increase. If 56 percent of an average student loan is used to pay for tuition, that leaves them, then, with a very small amount of money for the rest of the year to pay for living expenses, the cost of books and supplies, food, those kinds of things. Those are for students not living at home, and even if they are living at home, the leftover dough at the end of the month isn't very high.

So I look down the road and I say: well, you know, I have a 13-year-old son right now who, at this point anyway, has every intention of going to university. I wonder: what is the cost of that going to be to me and to him? What is his student debt level going to be? Is he going to be able to afford to stay in this province and go to school? What if he doesn't? Is that money going to follow him to another institution?

Certainly there are other provinces with higher tuition fees. However, those are smaller institutions. I can think of some that I looked at when I was looking at *Maclean's* magazine, the university issue with the rankings. Some of those institutions were much higher than our own. However, there are others that are much lower. We know that tuition rates are going to go to 30 percent. They may not be there now, but obviously that's where they're going to go to because that's where the minister set the ceiling. Is there going to be a corresponding increase, then, in the grants that are going to be available, or is there going to be a corresponding increase in student loans? So we're going to see the cost of tuition rise, we're going to see the student loans rise, and then our kids are going to come out of university with a tremendous debt load that doesn't allow them to start off and carry on in the work environment without having to pay their salaries to huge, huge loans.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

So with those few comments and knowing that the minister wants to trade his black tuition cap for something different, I'll take leave and allow someone else to speak.

3:30

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will join the debate on Bill 35, Colleges, Technical Institutes and Universities Statutes Amendment Act, 1998. In reviewing the bill, I find it difficult to see that putting the black cap at 30 percent – as has been pointed out earlier, that cap can increase with time – for 1998. Then what happens in a few years? The increase continues. As a matter of fact, in 1986 the cap was at 12 percent. By 1998 we're already at 30 percent, and there is probably no end to the increases.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, we've talked about the merits of higher learning, higher education. As we enter the demands of education through economic demands, higher institutions of learning – as Albertans enter the workforce, we recognize the need for more advanced education. Qualifications are higher, standards are higher, and costs are higher. A lot of families, in situations in my riding for instance, are struggling to put their children through postsecondary education. They are finding that both members of the family have to work as costs increase. A lot of students when they do go to university or college are not living at home, and the onus is on the parents to supplement the income of the student. Well, when they're not living at home, that obviously is not the case.

So then we come to the unfortunate mishap of a lot of students having to drop out because of costs, and it comes right down to that. Apartments in any city that has higher learning, universities or NAIT or SAIT or whatever, are able to ask a little bit more in terms of rent money. The housing is more costly; room and board is more costly. It just inflates, and students have to take on more jobs. They have to rely on family; they have to rely on friends. I've met a number of students who have to have two or three jobs just to meet tuition. We've had students come outside the Legislature, and they're protesting the high increase in tuition. They have to be listened to. These are our children. These are Alberta's future. They are the children in each of our ridings. We have to make a very, very conscious effort to support their endeavours.

Mr. Speaker, I find that Bill 35 is one of the initiatives of this government which puts a lot of us in opposition in an awkward position. I concur with the fact that we need to legislate caps on tuition, but I find that I don't agree with the level, as I've stated earlier, of 30 percent. It is not acceptable. We would certainly like to make a very strong amendment to this bill at some point, and then we will discuss the merits of the amendment at a future time.

Actually, in some regard it would be really easy and not terribly productive to rant and rage about tuition. I mean, we could all get carried away and say no, no, no and carry on, but I think, Mr. Speaker, this issue is one of seriousness. I say that with all due respect for the struggle that students are having in trying to get a higher education in this province. I hope it doesn't come down to the fact that a lot of our students have to leave the province of Alberta and seek the learning and skills that are necessary in the workforce in another province.

I think, Mr. Speaker, the onus is on us in this Legislature, in the government, to make sure that all students are privy to an accessible education. A lot of problems that we have in society unfortunately stem from a group of people who perhaps have not had the advantage of further education. We find them on social assistance and on the welfare rolls. I think if we track back the events or the occurrences of some of the displays of bad behaviour on the streets, we find that it's due to a lack of education. It stems back a lot of times to incentives through parent encouragement, and it's also dictated by dollars and cents. That is very unfortunate, because everybody should be entitled to be allowed or feel welcome and feel it is in the realm of possibility to be able to go to school and not incur a heavy debt by the time they finish.

I think that scares off a lot of students, when they think they're going to start off with a \$35,000, \$40,000 debt by the time they graduate from university. I, fortunately, was not one of these people who had to work or struggle to go to university. My parents were able to accommodate the needs of the family.

MRS. SOETAERT: You were lucky.

MS PAUL: That's correct. I was very fortunate, Mr. Speaker, so I have a lot of empathy for young people who do not have that opportunity.

Also, we should identify, as I've pointed out, that the student population in terms of age has increased. I think with this cap of 30 percent, the assumption is that the student would be living at home, but as I've already pointed out, that is not necessarily the right assumption. I think the government should have a serious look at that as well.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to reiterate that I feel this is a very important bill. It does deserve discussion from all members of the House. It is the future of Albertans. It is the future of our children. It must be discussed. It must change. The cap of 30 percent is not acceptable. It's going to increase in a few years, and I don't think that's acceptable. I will not be supporting the bill at all. I think the black cap has spoken on its own merit. It is black, and I believe that it would be a black day for our students.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

3:40

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I'd be disappointing my constituents if I didn't take the opportunity to voice my concerns about this bill.

I know the minister of transportation thought I'd mention 794 and the students that travel it every day to university. That is part of the concern, but it's not part of the bill.

In all seriousness, everyone well remembers and knows Senator Nick Taylor. He used to always say – which I could have mentioned in the previous bill had I had the opportunity to speak, but I didn't – that our greatest resource is not in the ground; it is between our ears, implying that the best money spent . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Our ears.

MRS. SOETAERT: Our ears, the Liberal ears.

. . . implying that the best money we could spend as a government, as a society, as parents would be to invest in our children's education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MRS. SOETAERT: There's agreement over there, so that's good, but actions speak louder than words. I know, because I've often spoken loudly, but nobody seems to hear over there. [interjections] Grande Prairie-Wapiti I know is dying to speak on this, because he loves entering debate with me. I'm sure he'll say 30 percent is too high. But I cannot speak for him, and I'm sure he will take that opportunity.

I want to express some concerns that we see our students facing. I know students who, if they're going to the University of Alberta right now, have tuition of around \$4,000. That doesn't even touch books or student union fees or all those extras. [interjection] Thirty-eight hundred dollars? Thirty-four hundred dollars; pardon me. Obviously my son is getting money from his mother that he shouldn't be. Except that it varies by the number of courses you take and the department that you are in, and that's really good for me to hear. [interjections] It does actually. [interjection] It is difficult for students who go full-time because it's expensive. It's very difficult to make \$4,000 in the summer months.

AN HON. MEMBER: Nothing's free. Nothing in this world is free.

MRS. SOETAERT: Nothing in the world is free. Of course not. But you know what? Let's be realistic. If you're 19 years old and you get a summer job . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're about to depart this Chamber for a considerable period of time. The hon. member is attempting to speak to Bill 35. The chair would encourage her to do just that, rather than engaging all of the different members that are near or far in her debate. Hon. members, please don't be tempted by this invitation by either the chair or the hon. member to engage in debate, except if you want to debate, please rise in your place and in your turn and speak to the bill at hand. But if we could have the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert stick to the bill, then we can all perhaps have a happier afternoon.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know it's tempting for people to hop into the discourse because I like to, you know, encourage debate. But I respect what you're saying, and I will speak to the bill.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: I want to give for an example a student who is going full-time, who has approximately a \$3,500 tuition to pay. Either they're driving from home or living in town. If they're driving from home, they need a vehicle if they live out in the country. You have to pay gas and parking. If you live in town, you have to catch a bus. If your parents live close to a university, that is very fortunate for you. But the reality in Alberta is that most of our students don't live near a university.

They've got that expense of either physically getting an apartment in town or driving to town every day on bad highways like 794. On top of that they have books, their rent, and, you know, they do have some living expenses. I would venture to say

that most students are not extravagant. They aren't. They don't have an extensive wardrobe, and they don't have an extensive social life – well, that costs them money; let's put in that way. They really don't. They work hard in order to pass, and they don't have much free time.

When all is said and done, most have to take out a loan from the bank because over the summer you cannot make \$7,000 or even \$6,000. At the 7 bucks an hour that most students get paid you can't make enough to survive a year at university. So, then, this government is assuming that you will automatically go in debt if you're a student. That's the assumption at a 30 percent cap. You are expecting students to be in debt.

The minister indicates that only 50 percent of them will be in debt, and it is assumed that the rest are being sponsored by a parent or a guardian or someone who cares about them who has money. That to me is a double standard. That's a double standard. Realistically, I'm saying that those students who put themselves through on their own will be in debt. I'm going to go through this again. Try making 7 bucks an hour, living on your own, paying your own tuition, your own rent, your own gas for probably an old jalopy that you drive. Try being a full-time student making 7 bucks an hour through the four summer months. You can't do it without getting in debt. Even if you have a part-time job – I know of students who do – this government is expecting people to be in debt. That's disappointing. We've all agreed in here that the most valuable thing we can do is educate our young people. So actions speak louder than words, and I would say 30 percent is too high a cap. [interjections] You know, people say you don't need a car. Then you must live near the university and catch a bus. How fortunate that you live near a university. There are people who don't, many of us. How much is a bus pass right now?

MR. SAPERS: Fifty bucks.

MRS. SOETAERT: Fifty bucks a month. If you go to university and you need to catch a bus for the eight months, at 50 bucks that's \$400 more. They're assuming you can pay your own car insurance, that you can catch a ride with a friend.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I don't think you should get something for nothing. I really don't, although – and I've often wondered this myself – there are people that would say: should postsecondary education be as accessible as kindergarten to grade 12 within this province? Wouldn't that be an ideal situation? I don't think it's realistic, given the constraints of budgets. But wouldn't that be a phenomenal move for society? You know, there was a time when after grade 8 you paid your own way. People thought: that's ridiculous to pay for grade 12. Now it's acceptable by society that you would at least pay up to grade 12, that a government would provide that. So some people laugh and say that's absolutely ridiculous to say it should be free. I think it's something worthy of debate as well. Maybe there will be a time – and maybe we'll see it – when secondary education may be so valued in our society that we make it as accessible as possible for as many students that want to access it, that we value it that much.

3:50

Interestingly, the other expense that I find – and I don't think it's addressed in this bill – is that there's a \$40 or \$45 ticket to apply to go to university or Grant MacEwan or Grande Prairie college or wherever you're going with each application. I think that's something the minister should look at, that if you apply to

a university and perhaps you aren't allowed in or are unable to get into one faculty, that application and the money for it would be transferable to another. Those kinds of things are added little expenses every time a student turns around.

Now, I know that many banks have a lending procedure for students, and it gives them a fairly reasonable lending rate and lending plan. Let's say you borrow \$5,000 in the first year and over the course of the summer you pay back a portion of it, maybe have a bit for the next year's tuition, but the second year you're close to \$8,000, \$9,000 in debt. Eventually, at the end of four years, you could be \$15,000 in debt. That's an extremely high burden before you've even started at a job.

I really do believe the minister of advanced education takes pride in his role as the minister of advanced education. We don't want to be too enthusiastic about that, but I do think he does take pride in that role. But that holds a tremendous responsibility. If his role is to make sure that as many students as can, that want to, that have the ability to, have the opportunity to go to secondary education in this province, then I would venture to say that it's his responsibility within his caucus, within this Legislature to make it as accessible as possible. There is no doubt that accessibility is tied to dollars. It's quite a heavy burden that students get out with right now when you're talking close to a \$20,000 debt. That's too much. I'd hate to see people not go because the debt load is too much for them. A missed opportunity. We can say: well, you can always go back later in life. That's true, but it's much more difficult to go back later in life. Most people have mortgages and families and jobs. To go back later on in life is very difficult and just as expensive.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I like to agree when I can with this government, but I can't agree on this tuition cap. I can't. I know people are disappointed with that. I know they respect my opinion on that, and they take it under advisement regularly when I speak here. I really feel for those students who right now don't have the financial support of families who can afford this and who are looking at a tremendous debt before they are even out in the workforce. It's not like school is just a breeze. School is a lot of hard work. It's hard to see the rewards of that if you're going further and further in debt while you're going to school.

I very much value education. I value secondary education. I picture a day – and I hope I will see it in this society – when we value education so much that it's accessible just as kindergarten to grade 12 is. That would be an ideal society. Maybe it's not realistic right now in 1998, but that would be a wonderful goal for a government, to encourage that. We may not achieve it during this government's reign but maybe someday.

So with those words and concerns that the tuition cap is too high, I will take my seat and thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 35.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I promise not to take a real long time, but I did want to talk about Bill 35 and the hon. minister's attempt here to cap tuition fees at 30 percent. I listened very carefully to the previous speaker and the comments that she was making, and I want to talk to you about some of the kids that I've dealt with in my riding, including my own son.

A while ago in the Assembly I rose to make a member's statement on a group that I had met with. These were young people going to the University of Calgary, and I took them a bunch of information about tuition fees and . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Were they Tory party members?

MS HALEY: No. Actually, hon. member, they weren't party members, but I'd appreciate your keeping your interjections to a minimum.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MS HALEY: I'll get there, Mr. Speaker.

The point of the meeting was to try and talk to them about what their concerns were with regard to university, to the costs involved for them to go to university, and what other problems they might have felt about government policies. The interesting thing that came out of that meeting was not that the tuition fees were too high – they didn't think they were – not that they had to borrow money to go. They felt that that was fair. What came out of that meeting was their concern about employment standards and not knowing that there were employment standards. Many of them felt that over the previous two or three years, while they'd had part-time jobs in high school and once they also got into university, many of them had been taken for granted, felt a little bit abused by some of their employers, and had absolutely no knowledge of the rights that they had and that they do have the ability to protect themselves or have themselves defended.

I have a son in university, and I want to talk about him. He's a young man of 20 years of age, working very hard, taking courses at the U of C, and he also has to have a part-time job in order to pay his tuition fees. He borrows money from the local bank because he doesn't qualify for a student loan, so he has no hope of being able to reap any benefit on a grant or a reduction in how much he owes. His comments to me are that he will pay less in the tuition fees than he would in fact pay to buy a new car, and that's for a four-year program. He feels that his education is of far more benefit to him than a new car would be.

I think that at some point you have to have perspective on this issue. We're not asking these kids to pay 100 percent. They are subsidized to the tune of 70 percent by the taxpayers of this province, and I think that's ample. I think from my son's point of view and from a number of other young people that I've talked to that what they want more than anything is for the universities to be accountable back to them on how the money is spent at the university level and what actually gets classified into operating expenses.

My only request of the minister would be to ensure that those young people do have a voice back to that administrative level and that they have an opportunity to clearly understand what goes into creating that 30 percent tuition cap and that they have some ability to help control that.

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

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

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to add a few comments about Bill 35 as well this afternoon. There have been some comments made about the importance of postsecondary education for our students, and I certainly agree with that a hundred percent. But I do agree with the minister's recommendation here on legislating the 30 percent cap. It was an issue that came up, actually prior to the election, by the Red Deer College Students' Association. The then president approached me, and while it was the government policy at that time, they were

somewhat concerned that that policy could be changed and wanted to see it put into legislation. That is exactly what the minister is doing with this piece of legislation, and I support that. But there are a couple of other comments I want to make as they relate to postsecondary education, because there have been a number of things happen in the province over the last four or five years that are really quite significant.

4:00

Mr. Speaker, you don't always have to go to an institution to get your education. I was at actually a signing ceremony this week in Calgary, at the University of Calgary, between the certified general accountants and the University of Calgary to deliver a distance education degree. It's called a bachelor of accounting science degree. It is designed solely for distance education. You can take that anywhere in Alberta, anywhere in Canada, anywhere in the world. Upon completion of that program, you will receive a University of Calgary degree and a certified general accountant designation. It's an example of a very positive collaborative approach. You can take this at your home. So there are some innovative things that are happening when it comes to postsecondary education, and we have got to stop looking primarily at bricks and mortar and look at different ways of delivering education. We're in a different world, our kids are in a different world, and we have to and the universities have to and the technical schools have to find different ways to respond to the demand.

Another positive thing has happened. If we go back even prior to just when I came into office in the first year, 1993, one of the common concerns that arose from students was transferability of credits from institution to institution. They would take one course here and not be given credit for it over there, or they couldn't take a program at Red Deer College, transfer it to the University of Alberta or the University of Calgary and have it accepted. What has happened over the last four years is we have seen a really positive move to collaborative degrees. Red Deer College now offers . . .

MR. SAPERS: What has this got to do with the tuition cap bill?

MR. DOERKSEN: Well, I'm generally speaking to the principle of the bill, hon. member, which is what you're permitted to do in second reading. There have been many comments made about the value of postsecondary education, and I'm just adding to that. We're talking about the cost of education for kids and how to make it better; okay?

I'm saying that with the collaborative approach, if you look at Red Deer College now, the fact that we can now offer at least four degrees completely at Red Deer College, they don't have to then come to Edmonton or they don't then have to move to Calgary to obtain that university degree. Now, it is not a Red Deer College degree. Depending on what the program is, they will be given either a University of Alberta degree or a University of Calgary degree.

The point is that we are getting some co-operation among institutions to make things more affordable for students. Let's not forget what's important here. It is the students that are important. If we keep getting locked into our own little areas, as we were in the past, it does make it more difficult for students. So I'm saying that over the past number of years, we have seen some very encouraging developments take place with the delivery of postsecondary education to make it more accessible and more affordable for students.

I think those are positive, and I wanted to make those comments, Mr. Speaker. This is the time to do that and support the minister, and I urge all members to vote in favour of Bill 35.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise and make a few comments on Bill 35. This bill will entrench in legislation the government's existing policy of ensuring a publicly funded postsecondary institution's budget and how that budget is to be structured so that funding through student tuition fees does not reach 30 percent of net operating expenditures before the year 1999-2000 and does not exceed that percentage thereafter. This bill also grants the minister, from what I read, the authority to waive this requirement for individual institutions for a specified time period. Also, it reconfirms to me the disturbing trend of this government to govern through regulation, because it leaves regulations to define tuition fees and net operating expenditures and determining how those are to be calculated.

Now, the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development I believe is very committed to postsecondary education in this province. He's very committed not only to students who are attending universities but to students who are attending technical schools and community colleges scattered throughout the province. For instance, Mr. Speaker and hon. members in this House, the department is introducing, I believe, \$500 a year scholarships for the first time to students who are attending trade schools to study compulsory trades. I am still waiting for the fine print and the details on this program, but I believe it is a step in the right direction. I have to have a look at this in detail and study it further. But if there's only going to be one student in each trade certificate in one calendar year who is going to be eligible for this tuition break or this scholarship, well, I don't know if that is significant, in just that there's going to be one. We will wait and we will see how the program develops by the department, but I believe the hon. member is to be congratulated for bringing forward this idea.

It's disturbing to look at the institutions here. If we're going to compare, say, 1996-97 through to the year 1999-2000, for the degree-granting universities in this province, roughly, the tuition fee revenue accounts for 22 or 21 percent. If we were to increase this in such a short period of time, I would be curious if the department of advanced education has any studies that are completed on if there's going to be a drop-off in students as the tuition fees go up.

Certainly one of the principles of this society, not only in this province but in this entire country, is accessible, affordable education for everyone, not just a fortunate few. It does not matter which part of the city or which part of the province that you were born in; postsecondary education was available and modestly priced for everyone. But if we are to allow tuition fees to get out of hand, this is no longer going to be true, because we are limiting education, and whenever you limit education, you limit the ability of the citizens to provide for themselves adequately. The social consequences of restricting education to just a select few or a fortunate few is something that we do not want to get involved in in this province or in this country, Mr. Speaker.

I look at the public college sector in this province, and I don't know if a lot of the hon. members of this Assembly who represent rural areas have noticed that tuition fee revenue as a percentage

of net operating expenditure – for instance, for Fairview College up in the Peace district it's 7.5 percent. I understand from reading in the past that people go from all over the province up to Fairview to study small engine repair, a lot of agricultural issues. I believe there's even, Mr. Speaker, a course for greens-keepers up there. I'm not sure about this, but I believe there is.

MS BLAKEMAN: Landscape gardeners.

4:10

MR. MacDONALD: Landscape gardeners. Yes. Thank you.

What will happen, with this tuition increase, to places like Fairview College or Olds College, which gets from tuition fee revenue 10 or 11 percent of its net operating budget? Now, what's going to happen there? So many students from rural Alberta go there to study agriculturally related topics. If this bill is to drive up the price in this short a period of time, if we're going to collect 30 percent in tuition fees in a little less than three years, Mr. Speaker, what's going to happen to not only the students in these two community colleges but the agricultural communities from which they come?

We're always talking in this Assembly about diversifying the economy of this province and how value-added agricultural products are going to be the answer for us, and we're going to export these, Mr. Speaker. We're going to export all these value-added products. Not only are we going to bring them off the farm here, but we're going to manufacture and process them here, and then we're going to export them. This is the idea. As conventional oil and gas revenues decline, this sort of manufacturing and exporting goes on. I think we should be enhancing these community colleges so that there is personnel coming from them to be actively involved, not only working in these industries but managing these industries.

This Bill 35, well, I have to have some doubts about, because the whole idea of these community colleges is to have for the province an educated and skilled workforce. If we allow this to happen, perhaps people are not going to be able to afford to go there. You know, we're not only talking about the universities here, Mr. Speaker; we're also talking about colleges that provide a very, very adequate education to many other Albertans in many other walks of life.

If we look at Lakeland College, 13 percent of its revenue comes from tuition fees; Medicine Hat College, 16 percent. Mount Royal College in Calgary, on the other hand, is at 24 percent, as is Red Deer College. The two institutes of technology, one in northern Alberta and one in southern Alberta, are at roughly 20 percent. We're always talking about the shortage of skilled tradespeople in this province. If tuition fees are going up and up, perhaps people are just going to stay in the workforce and make do. They're not going to be able to afford to take the time off and increase their job skills.

Now, the minister, as I said before, I believe recognizes this problem, and his scholarship program may be a start. It's a modest start, and I congratulate him on that again. I'm going to wait and see how it works out. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that is a step in the right direction in that department, but we will wait and we will see what happens.

I'm very concerned about this, because as I said before, one of the fine principles in this country is that with initiative and hard work and an accessible, affordable education system, people can help themselves and they can better themselves and they can better their families. Whenever they do that, they better their community and they better their province. I am in no way in favour,

Mr. Speaker, of supporting a bill which I feel will restrict access to higher education beyond high school for Alberta students. I find it very, very difficult under these circumstances that I explained to support this bill, because we must – and I cannot emphasize this enough to the hon. members on both sides of the House this afternoon – keep our education system accessible and affordable to all.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development to close debate.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've listened quite intently to the questions that were raised today and plan to provide answers at the proper time. I understand and realize that there might be an amendment or so that will be coming forward. But we'll see what we will see.

On that basis, I'd like to move second reading of Bill 35.

[Motion carried; Bill 35 read a second time]

Bill 41

Agriculture Statutes (Livestock Identification) Amendment Act, 1998

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

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House to move second reading of Bill 41, namely the Agriculture Statutes (Livestock Identification) Amendment Act, 1998.

Maybe it's a good thing that I have a sore throat here because I'll really shorten up my comments.

Alberta Agriculture's brand inspection service is responsible for all aspects of registering, licensing enforcement, and identification of cattle being sold. This bill will enable the delegation of the administration of brand inspection to the cattle industry. We're proposing that all of these services be transferred together as a unit to a new industry partnership group called livestock identification services, otherwise known as LIS, and the income and expenses associated with running the service will be transferred as well.

Bill 41 is enabling legislation which allows government to delegate a particular service. Delegation is not a done deal, and the legislation has been worded to allow the administration of brand inspections by the government to continue if negotiations for delegations are not successful.

So why delegate in the first place? Well, we see this as a win/win proposition. The industry pays the full shot for brand inspection and feels the private sector could provide the services more efficiently than government. The industry also wants more to say in the service it pays for and gets. We as the government would like the industry to take more responsibility, both administratively and financially, for the services it finds most valuable.

Mr. Speaker, I should point out that although industry is interested in providing the full range of brand inspection services, including enforcement on the administrative side, producers have asked that responsibility for the act and regulations remain with the government. That is why we're not proposing to delegate the accountability aspect, only the administration.

Having said that, the newly delegated service will be accountable both to the government and to the industry it serves. A

secretariat will be appointed from Alberta Agriculture basically to be my eyes and ears for the service, handling questions or complaints as well as monitoring the administration of the program and the legislation, to make sure it's being run appropriately.

Negotiations between the government and LIS are under way, and these negotiations are expected to be successful. I know that one of my quick-thinking hon. colleagues is going to ask me why we're introducing this bill now when there are still aspects of the delegation to be worked out. I'll say this at the outset. We've accomplished a lot in a very short time frame. Industry and government are working hard to try to bring about this change, and they're really to be congratulated for their efforts.

One of the main aspects we're still working on – and it's important – is the transition of the staff involved from government to the private sector. We're working towards a July 1 target date for the transfer. That's why we're introducing this bill now. But I've said before and I'll say it again for the benefit of all concerned: we're not going to rush this thing through. We want to be certain that everyone is satisfied with this arrangement.

4:20

I mentioned the transition of staff involved from government to the private sector. There are approximately 35 brand inspectors and 45 part-time staff around Alberta. We're working hard to make sure these employees are treated fairly.

There has already been quite a bit of discussion about the proposed delegation in the industry and local newspapers around the province. Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to report that most producers and their organizations actively support this change. As I mentioned a moment ago, the livestock identification services organization is a new industry partnership group. It's important to point out that LIS is a not-for-profit company. It's being incorporated by industry associations to serve the livestock industry, not to make a profit. There are six producer groups which participate in livestock identification services, and they are as follows: the Alberta Auction Markets Association, Alberta Livestock Dealers & Order Buyers Association, Alberta Feeders Association, Alberta Cattle Feeders Association, Alberta Cattle Commission, and Western Stock Growers Association.

Mr. Speaker, I should mention that the brand inspection people conduct about 5 million cattle brand inspections every year, including 67,000 horse brand inspections. I know that there are some producers who do not support this change, and I appreciate their concern. It's not possible to satisfy every concern. But having said that, we believe that the vast majority of producers and producer organizations in Alberta not only support this change but are actively working to bring about the change, and we view this as a positive sign.

There are several aspects about Bill 41 that I'd like to highlight. One is that we are ensuring that the LIS will be able to continue enforcement by being able to employ special constables. Also, the RCMP contract for two officers will remain in effect. We are delegating functions under four agricultural statutes. For each statute we have specified my powers of delegation as minister as well as the provisions enabling the delegation.

There's one specific amendment I would like to mention. In the Brand Act we propose to move a number of definitions out of the act into regulations. This change will allow the industry to keep up with changing technologies or practices. Here's an example. If advances in technology change the way a brand can be applied, we can reflect that change more quickly with an amendment to regulations rather than having to change legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I should also mention the question of funds allocated for the transition. As we began this initiative in the 1997-98 fiscal year, we also earmarked funds for transition out of the '97-98 fiscal year budget. Since, of course, we are now into a new fiscal year, what we have done is to accrue these funds and place them in trust until such time as a satisfactory arrangement is in place. If at the end of the day we're not able to reach a satisfactory agreement with the LIS as a group to transfer the administration of brand inspection services, those funds would not be spent.

I certainly welcome the comments of my hon. colleagues on both sides of the House. I know that this is going to propel the industry into the next millennium in terms of livestock identification, being able to track carcass from table back to source. I'm particularly looking forward to answering any questions that you may have in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that the minister has done a fair bit of work on this. Somehow we were going to have an opportunity to have a briefing, but with the hours of this Legislature it hasn't happened formally, though we've had many informal conversations, also with the Member for Lethbridge-East, and I appreciate that.

So as not to disappoint the minister, I will ask, "Why are we doing this now?" being the sharp person over here. [interjections] I like to keep people awake on a Thursday afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I don't know what it is that just entices people to join in the debate, but here it is.

If I may express some concerns that I think the minister has heard – and maybe he will be able to address them. I realize that this is something that has been in the works for a little while and that we need this legislation in order to get in line with – what is it? – the LIS. [interjection] Yeah, with the industry. As a new critic to this I've been on a major learning curve, so please bear with me, Mr. Speaker.

[The Speaker in the chair]

One of the things that Alberta Agriculture commissioned was the Toma & Bouma report. Is that how you pronounce it? [interjection] So it's Toma & Bouma. Now, they did a review of livestock inspection services to find out how that could be improved. One of the things is that as a government you made money on this, so why have we given it up if it's actually something we're making money on? Maybe the industry can do it better, and maybe that's the reason. I guess I just question that if we had money coming into general revenue from that, why are we giving it up? [interjections] Now, we have some heckling from the crowd, and I appreciate that they may know it all with regard to this and maybe they've been at several meetings with the interested groups, but they should also appreciate that we just got the legislation and have done some phoning.

AN HON. MEMBER: Well, you said you wanted to take more money out of farmers' pockets.

MRS. SOETAERT: No. I did not say I want to take more money out of the farmers' pockets. Not at all.

That brings me to another question. When we privatize this, there is a concern that some people will get a cut rate. The bigger feedlots, for example, might get a cut rate on doing a thousand head at once as compared to the smaller owners who have to pay for each individual inspection. There's a question of fairness there that was brought to my attention, so I'd appreciate a response to that. Is it going to be so much per head? How do you control that?

The other thing that the minister said in his opening: you will have somebody on that delegated authority. He will be or she will be your eyes and ears. What if it isn't working? What's your recourse? What can you do, then, if it's not working? You're a nonvoting member on that authority, as I understand, so what power do you have to change anything? It's very nice to be eyes and ears, but if you can't speak, we're in a little bit of trouble there. [interjection] I'm quite sharp for a Thursday afternoon, I'd venture to say. You've missed some humour here, Mr. Speaker, but it's all there.

I'd like the minister to speak for a minute about the Toma & Bouma report. From my understanding of it I found that feedlot operators do not always value the brand inspection service, because theft is not a problem in a huge feedlot. They have their own inventory systems and don't feel there's a need for brand inspection there. I sense that that's where the biggest source of support for this privatization is coming from. I don't want this to be a certain advantage just for wealthy, big operators; I want it to be fair for everyone.

It was a concern that not everyone knew about this coming. I guess I'd ask: what was the government's role in educating and making this information known to all the associations? What process did you put in place to make sure that this privatization plan will reflect the view of all members, not just a few people in various cattle associations. I know that different organizations have supposedly told their membership. However, I think there's a government responsibility there and that it's the government's responsibility to inform the people that this is going to affect. So I would appreciate an answer to that. What process did you put in place to inform everyone? I have phoned some of the cattle people out in my neck of the woods, and some have heard about it. Most have, but they're actively involved in an association, so I would assume so. Where was that responsibility carried out?

4:30

I had a question about some concerns. We've had some cow/calf operators feel that they haven't been consulted, and I know some of your MLAs have heard that concern from some people in their ridings as well as I have. It was felt that the bigger feedlot operators were the only ones with a say in this. So I'd like you to give me some reassurance about that.

In fact, at the standing policy committee on agriculture and rural development just a couple of days ago – actually I was unable to make it, but one of our researchers was there. She is a wonderful, very capable person who listened attentively. I'm sure the chair of that committee may speak to this and voice the concerns that were raised at that standing policy committee. I would hope that he was there, considering that's an extra paycheque there. However, the Alberta grazing association pointed out that cow/calf producers had not been consulted on the options in that Toma & Bouma report, and they had been unable to get that report. So I think I'd like to question the availability of that report. Why was it that they couldn't get that report? I'm sure you had those questions brought to you from the ever capable chair of the standing policy committee. I'm sure he brought those concerns forward to you.

I have a question about brand enforcement. I'm worried about a conflict of interest with law enforcement when brand inspectors are controlled by the industry-run body. We've always seen law enforcement as separate from private industry. That is something that the government has been responsible for. So my concern is: could there be a conflict there, and how are you going to address that? I know that another one of my colleagues was pointing out her concerns about that, and she's hoping to have the opportunity to ask you about that too. Did you consult the RCMP before this change? Have they had adequate input? What did they say, and what were the results of all that? I'd appreciate knowing that, even though your voice is hoarse today. I'd appreciate having a level of comfort with that. [interjections] It's interesting what we all learn to speak on in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, but I'm giving it my best shot with the knowledge I continue to gain from being in this portfolio. I know that it's much to the pleasure and enjoyment of several members. However, you can appreciate that I'm doing my best. If you think it's worrisome coming from me, wait; there's more to speak after me.

I want to talk about the cost of this for a minute. How will a private brand inspection service maintain service and increase efficiency? Is the ultimate goal to be cheaper? One of the concerns that one of the cattlemen out in my neck of the woods said is that he hopes this doesn't eventually eliminate branding. He said that with all the electronic equipment, you have to be rather close to identify the animal. Of course, at least sitting on your perch on the fence, you can look across the pen to those cows and see a brand. You don't have to get right in there with them with a little metal detector. Mr. Speaker, that was his idea, that cattlemen didn't want to see the demise of brands, actual physical brands. You know, they kind of make it an event out on his ranch every so often, so I think it's almost a little bit of a tradition there as well.

A couple of questions. The minister said that he wants this out right now. I'm assuming that it'll be on the table and that interested parties will have the summer to look at it. Or were you expecting it to go through quickly in a week or so? Is this out on the table over the summer so all interested parties can know what's happening and maybe suggest amendments to the minister? I'm asking about that.

I am asking about the current employees. You had said that was in negotiation. I know they're part of a union right now. What will happen as it's privatized, and how will that be taken care of? I'm concerned that they'll either have to transfer to a new agency or take a buyout or an early retirement. I wouldn't want to ever question that a fair severance package was also in line.

I know this act includes many parts to it: the Brand Act, the Livestock Identification and Brand Inspection Act, the Livestock and Livestock Products Act, and the Stray Animals Act. [interjections] I don't see the humour in some of this, but obviously some members do.

I want to ask about the Stray Animals Act. A duty of brand inspectors right now, that they quite willingly do without extra pay, is they go out if there's an animal that's stray and capture and impound the animal. Now, if an animal is trespassing and if the owner cannot be traced, they can sell the animal. They can also go onto private property to capture stray animals. What will this mean when it's privatized? Who's going to have that power? Are the industry inspectors going to have the same power? Will they have to be paid extra by the farmer whose animal is stray? Right now the government pays for these brand inspectors. So if

there's a stray animal on my property and I contact the company, the stray people . . . [interjection] Oh, the suggestion is to chase it off, and that's a good suggestion. But then it's just giving the neighbour a problem, something I would not want to do. So would that be a cost for the farmer or the cattle person or whomever whose animal it is? If it's unidentified, then does it go to that private industry and get sold in the auction and that go back to the industry? So if you wouldn't mind clarifying that for me.

I see in here – it's a horse association. What's it called?

4:40

MS OLSEN: Ponoka Light Horse.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, it's not the Ponoka Light Horse.

But those people with triple A: I saw they had input into this. I was wondering how horse owners fall into this. They will all just be part of it, and they've had input? Okay. They have a part on the board.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I would ask – and maybe it's in here somewhere – who is on the delegated authority? Is that in the bill and I've just missed it in my copious notes here?

Then I appreciate that. I think I've truly asked about as many questions as I can understand to ask. However, I may come up with more, and I realize that I may have to address those in Committee of the Whole.

I see the industry for the most part as wanting this and in a way prepared for it, though not everyone has known about it, and there are concerns. I guess privatization of this may work, but I caution the minister that not everything that's been privatized by this government has worked. Some of it has not worked well at all. I know it's a big step. I know you have a lot of people to be accountable to. I appreciate working with you to bring those issues to you that I hear about from different groups that did not know this was happening and couldn't get hold of the Toma & Bouma report, which I think does not reflect well on the department of agriculture.

It's with caution and with limited knowledge on this industry that I do voice some concerns about this piece of legislation, but I appreciate that the minister has worked on it to some extent and has been in constant communication with myself and Lethbridge-East. So with those few words, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this bill. I do hope that the chair of the standing policy committee has an opportunity to talk about this as well, because I appreciate all the information all members can give me on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a few comments on this Bill 41 this afternoon. It's a noble effort once again at privatization, and it's ironic that this bill, Bill 41, I don't think is going to live the life of notoriety of the original Bill 41, that allowed all this creation of the delegated administrative organizations and the privatization that has occurred. There were many problems with the original Bill 41. As the years go by, the public is becoming more and more aware of the deregulation and privatization. There was Bill 57. Fortunately the government of the day had come to its senses and put that bill in its pocket. This Bill 41 is a grandson of the original Bill 41. Also, a person has to be quite skeptical of this zeal for privatization and deregulation.

However, when we look at this, the privatized brand inspection services that are responsible for the registry, licensing enforce-

ment, and identification of cattle and other livestock, Mr. Speaker, it's a very important issue in many areas of Alberta. There are certainly many varieties of cattle that are produced in this province, and to have an accurate brand system and identification process is very, very important. We don't want the idea of an aluminum cattle liner hidden in a thicket of cottonwood in the middle of the night being loaded with cattle that belong to a cow/calf operator and taken away in the middle of the night. This is an important issue.

The idea of branding is as old as the settlement of the west. We're entering a new century, and the idea that we're thinking about something new, a new way of doing this, is not wrong. We all think of branding, and of course, Mr. Speaker, we're going to think about the ad on television where the cowboys are around the campfire after a hard day's work: the picante sauce, it's from New York City. [interjections] Some of my colleagues here do not understand, and that is an example of how they do not understand how important cattle identification is to some hon. members in this House. It's an issue; trust me.

The cowboys definitely have a mistrust of the products from back east. We have to understand that, and we can understand that by remembering the commercial. "From New York City," one cowboy says to the other. I hope those cattle that are in that cattle liner that's hidden in the cottonwood – we may have a few yearlings, we may have a few calves, and we may have a few cattle. [interjections] We have to be careful, Mr. Speaker – and this is evidence that there is a division in this House between the hon. members that represent rural areas and my hon. colleagues – because cattle inspection and cattle branding is not a laughing matter.

Now, Bill 41, the privatization of inspection. We have to understand that the review that was done, the review that I believe was initiated by the hon. minister of agriculture – he believes that the industry will be in a better position, Mr. Speaker, to respond to and take advantage of long-term changes in the industry. The Canadian Cattlemen's Association is currently studying ways to set up a national cattle identification program through electronic means. This privately sponsored idea would mark livestock from birth to slaughterhouse and enable an animal to be traced back for contact with disease. I suppose in certain situations if the cowboys were around the barbecue and the picante sauce had to go on and this meat was somehow deficient, it would be an issue that perhaps could help the public health inspectors. If there was a restaurant serving bad steaks, this is a very good idea.

Now, the new livestock identification program will require a delivery organization, Mr. Speaker. Industry leaders think the new changes will be easier to implement in a privatized service, that can respond to market opportunities. They think that if the livestock inspection service is privatized now, Alberta, the largest cattle province in Canada, will be in a better position to lead the way with our national program. I understand that current information technology within Alberta agriculture is outdated when we compare it to B.C. and Saskatchewan, and I'm sure the hon. members across the way don't want to be behind B.C. and Saskatchewan in any way.

4:50

Mr. Speaker, I understand that there are some cattlemen in southern Alberta that are very upset with these proposed changes. They spoke with many of their neighbours, and none had heard of this proposed privatization in this Bill 41. That concerns me, because we all talk about openness and accountability. This leads me to believe that perhaps the government is not as open and accountable as people may think. If these individuals who are at

the heart of cattle country in southern Alberta are not aware of the changes and they're phoning their respective hon. member and asking him or her to complain to the minister of agriculture, then perhaps we have to be suspicious of the initiatives that take place whenever we talk about openness and accountability. There's certainly been people left out of this process. The cow/calf operators up in the Peace district have some complaints and some suspicions about this bill.

The privatization, Mr. Speaker, of livestock inspection services may facilitate this implementation of the national livestock identification program, which is important for the tracking of disease or infection. We have to consider all of the ideas with the privatization and deregulation.

In finishing my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I find that Bill 41, the son of the original bill, is very, very similar to what the original initiatives of privatization and deregulation are like. I will follow this with interest, and I will see how it develops.

If I may remind this House that our own party is going to have a leadership race here next week, and I bet you, Mr. Speaker, that new leader is not even going to ask me to be the agricultural critic.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

MR. FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I only want to make a few very short remarks as I know that the minister wants to wind up. My first remark is that the second biggest industry here in the province is agriculture. It is surprising and I know it is quite funny, but it is a shame that we don't know more about the industry in this House.

I want to compliment the minister for bringing this forward, because yes, it does upgrade and streamline and privatize. I heard you say a few minutes ago that when they're privatizing the service, Mr. Speaker, then we're just taking the service out of the government operating it and moving it over here to the industry. There was always a fear that a lot of the rules were going to get changed on the way, and that is not true. The industry is going to be able, after we get through privatizing, to make their own changes and make the changes with the identification program and do that themselves and be part of it.

I know that the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert would like to use microchips in her cattle and probably put a remote control on them so she could bring the cows home at night, but I'm not sure that all of the industry would agree with her and her identification. Certainly our export market and tracking the health of the animals are very, very vital to our industry in this province, and we have to look at that in a much broader way and see that we don't lose market share out in that world market.

I want to make one more comment. Some of the members that we met from the Grazing Council came in and said that they did not have as much information as they would have liked to have had. That report that they were talking about was out to the industry I believe it was a number of months ahead of time. They had the opportunity to get it, albeit they said that they didn't get it. At our committee we did promise them: "Take the report. Go home and read it, and if you need clarification, work with the minister and work with the department. Find out the things that you don't like about it and let us know." I'm sure that that communication is there, because we did have six of our cattle organizations that came to our standing policy committee and promised us that everybody had the information and that everyone was aware of it. So I don't think it's the fault of the department

of agriculture or the fault of our minister that the information didn't get to certain people. There is an obligation for everyone to get that information.

With that, this is an excellent bill, and the industry is looking forward to it. I look forward to the minister's remarks.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to add a few comments on behalf of my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, from whom I've learned a few things about agriculture, and especially from my colleague from Edmonton-Gold Bar, from whom I've learned a great deal about the livestock industry.

Actually I did want to add a few comments in relation to the delegated administrative authority. We know that there are pitfalls in the DAOs now, and I'm just wondering what process the agriculture minister followed in terms of having this DAO developed. I would envision the following elements as part of an effective accountability framework. I would ask the minister: if he indeed did prepare an administrative profile to assess the particular program, in this case the livestock branding functions that are being delegated, how did you determine that this particular service would be a candidate for delegation to a nongovernmental organization? If you did do a profile, I would expect that the profile would include such things and examine such issues as market strength, political resistance, cost, efficiency, quality of service, impact on employees, legal barriers, risk, resources, and monitoring and control.

Other things that I would envision and would want to know are if the minister conducted a detailed cost-benefit analysis outlining the cost savings and benefits that could be achieved by delegating the program service or, in this particular case, the service to the private sector. Did you provide a clear rationale to all stakeholders and certainly to the House? Have you been able to provide here a clear rationale as to how this delivery will be improved, this whole notion of delegating the whole brand and livestock identification services? I'm just wondering if that consideration was given. Also, in relation to if a decision was made, and in this case again for livestock identification services, was it based on economic criteria? The implementation of a full public tender process: was that done? That should be required to encourage competition and prevent the creation of centres of private-sector monopoly. So I'm wondering if that was done? Did you clearly set out the performance standards and allow for effective follow-up and monitoring?

5:00

How did you determine who is going to become involved in this particular delegated administrative authority? I'm just wondering also what you're going to do in order to follow up, given the pitfalls. I think the Minister of Labour probably should be advising you on some of those pitfalls that exist, because I think he's had a few problems in that respect.

I think that one of the pitfalls is that this minister will now be able to enter into a contract or administrative agreement to delegate any particular responsibility, and that can be done through Bill 41, 1994. That can be done through an order in council. It doesn't require debate or the consent of the Legislative Assembly. As we move towards more of these delegated administrative authorities and the ability for the minister to be able to delegate through regulations, we have no debate; we're kind of bypassing the Legislature. So I have some concerns with this whole process in that respect.

The other pitfall that I might point out is that a review is done at the sole discretion of the minister. The minister may in fact refuse to review an action or decision of a DAO and has that option. Again we're bypassing the Legislature. The whole notion of monitoring and accountability is then in question.

The other thing that concerns me is that once you have a delegated administrative authority, no liability lies against the government for any action taken by that DAO that causes injury or loss to any person as a result. So, again, another concern. The government retains control over the standards and the legislation, policy, and regulations, but doesn't take responsibility for any of the liabilities. So that's another concern I have.

There are many other pitfalls, and they've been pointed out. I don't know if the minister has looked at the Auditor General's report for the Department of Labour and some of the recommendations made in relation to DAOs and improving the accountability of those specific ones that exist now to make sure that we don't fall into the same trap.

The other questions I have were in relation to the enforcement aspect of it. I believe the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert brought it up. When you have a DAO, you're certainly looking at the for-profit sector now. What are the ramifications of working with law enforcement agencies and the brand inspectors that currently exist with the RCMP? My question is: what type of information is going to be passed back and forth between a private agency and a public enforcement agency? So those are just some concerns I have. Have we thought that far down the road?

Certainly, that's not to say that DAOs don't work. I think that there is a potential given a proven accountability framework, that there are certain services and programs that would absolutely be better served within that environment.

Those are my comments on this bill, and I move to adjourn debate, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion to adjourn debate by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, would all those members in favour please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development to close debate.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the . . .

THE SPEAKER: Sorry. The process always is that if an hon. member still wants to continue – hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you want to participate?

MR. SAPERS: I want to participate in debate on Bill 41.

THE SPEAKER: Great.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we've had some fun with this bill. We've also raised some serious questions in the House on this bill. There are some questions that we believe we would have the benefit of consulting with many of the stakeholder groups and their representatives, and it was for that reason that

my colleague for Edmonton-Norwood had suggested that we would adjourn debate at this time as opposed to concluding second reading.

I would like to ask the House for agreement to adjourn debate at this time. I will move that we do so.

THE SPEAKER: On the motion by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to adjourn debate, all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

Bill 39

Financial Administration Amendment Act, 1998

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, Bill 39, the Financial Administration Amendment Act, 1998, is a continuation of a process that began some years ago when it was identified that there's been a proliferation over time of agencies, boards, and commissions and that in fact there should be a process to evaluate whether agencies, boards, and commissions should indeed continue. The way that process was addressed was to give notice to all agencies, boards, and commissions that in fact there would be a sunset clause put on their very existence, and unless there was a review of why those agencies, boards, and commissions are even in existence and an acceptance of the fact that they were indeed serving a purpose in the province of Alberta, they would automatically be evaporated within a certain sunset period being January 1 of 1999.

This is a continuation of that process, the various agencies, boards, and commissions being identified under their areas of ministry. I think it's been a vital process. I think to have it ongoing is also important, because it deals with the reality that sometimes governments just grow by virtue of their very existence. Unless we challenge ourselves in terms of what we're doing and why we have certain institutions in place, that sort of growth can happen in an indiscriminate way and be an increasing burden on the backs of people, both in a regulatory way and on the taxation side also.

So that's what this process is involved in, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a healthy process – I think it may be unique in Canada – that we serve notice on these agencies, boards, and commissions that they will be gone, evaporated, finished unless they can prove their existence.

I know that members want to get into this discussion, and I also know that it's been a long week, a long day, a long hour, and a long five minutes. Based on that, at this point I would move that we adjourn debate on Bill 39.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer has moved that we adjourn debate on Bill 39. All those members in favour of adjourning the debate, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

[Pursuant to Government Motion 6 the Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m.]

