

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 20, 1998 1:30 p.m.
Date: 98/04/20
 [The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Well, good afternoon, and welcome back.

Let us pray.

O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly His Excellency José Manuel Duarte de Jesus, Portugal's ambassador to Canada. His Excellency is accompanied by the cultural affairs counsellor for the embassy of Portugal in Ottawa, Carlos Alberto Gomes da Silva, and the consul of Portugal in Vancouver, Walid Maciel Chaves Saad. I'd like to take this opportunity to officially welcome His Excellency to Alberta and to wish him an enjoyable and productive stay in our province. While in Alberta His Excellency will be meeting with public- and private-sector officials to discuss the potential for co-operation in several important commercial areas including environmental services, waste management, tourism, and research and technology. I'd ask that the ambassador and his party rise in the Speaker's gallery and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That has such a nice ring to it.

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy – in fact I probably can't describe to you how happy I am – to be able to introduce to you and to the Legislative Assembly today the new leader of the Alberta Liberal Party. She has distinguished herself in public life in Alberta, she distinguished herself in our leadership race, and she is already distinguishing herself in her new role with our party. She brings great strength, experience, and dedication to public service. She also brings with her to this new life her most stalwart supporters, her husband, Hilliard MacBeth, who is with her today in your gallery, and her son Fraser, who isn't here today because he has educational obligations elsewhere. I would ask that the Members of the Legislative Assembly join me in extending our traditional welcome to Hilliard MacBeth and to the leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, Nancy MacBeth.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm please to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1997. A copy of this report will be provided to all members of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with this government's openness and accountability, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today answers to written questions 1 and 2 and Motion for a Return 7.

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table four copies of the response to Motion for a Return 55.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to file with the Assembly copies of a letter I sent to Joe and Josephina Crow Shoe of Brocket congratulating them on having recently been honoured with the national aboriginal achievement award. Mr. and Mrs. Crow Shoe have made invaluable contributions to preserving the heritage and culture of Alberta's Blackfoot peoples at the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump interpretive centre.

I'm also pleased to file copies of the official song of the International Association for Volunteer Effort '98 world volunteer conference, *It Makes a Difference*, which was performed in public for the first time today at a volunteer rally held to mark Volunteer Week.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table the provincial accountability framework for child and family services. This has the governance framework, a monitoring and evaluation system, a funding allocation model, policies and finance administration information as well as current protocols and protocol framework for service delivery.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a letter from the Central Alberta Grazing Association expressing their concerns over the legislation around branding inspection.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The economists would call this pent-up demand. I have a number of things to table. I'll start off with the announcement, sir, dated April 20, which announces the dedication of the Ralph Klein memorial hospital on the site of the old General hospital.

I have correspondence from some 30 citizens anxious that there be no invocation of the notwithstanding clause in terms of sexual orientation.

I have correspondence from Dr. Brenda Mann with respect to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I have correspondence from the Seniors Community Health Council with serious concerns about Bill 37.

Finally, I have a copies of a notice from the Calgary Regional Medical Staff Association with their recommendation in terms of elections to regional health authorities.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair would like to table a memorandum from the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross requesting

that Bill 212, the Amusements Amendment Act, 1998, be brought to the Committee of the Whole on Wednesday, April 22, 1998, as soon as the House business will allow.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table copies of a letter expressing support for the recent Supreme Court ruling from a constituent who asked me to do it on her behalf.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is quite a list today. Before we proceed, I want to acknowledge the presence of one member today in the Assembly, and that's the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, who was elected in a by-election three years ago today, April 20, 1995.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two constituents of mine who are seated in your gallery, sir. They are Mr. and Mrs. Hans and Margarete Paulsen. They have a long-time relationship with our family in that our two daughters met in Girl Guides and have enjoyed a long friendship for the last 15 years. So I'd ask Margarete and Hans to please stand and receive the warm reception of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, you have a guest today?

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 59 very knowledgeable grade 6 students from St. Teresa Catholic elementary school. They are accompanied today by two teachers, Mr. Charles Stuart and Mrs. Camille Hamel, and three adults: Mrs. Deb Smith, Mrs. Debbie Breakwell, and Mr. Ken Hilsenteger. If they would stand please in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure and a delight to introduce to you and through you to all members of our House a good friend of mine who has served a very large group of constituents in my area of Edmonton-Mill Creek. He's also the executive director of the West Edmonton Business Association and a dedicated and active follower of the political process. M. Guy Ouellette, lève-toi pour recevoir toutes les admirations de nous tous ici.

1:40

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions I'd like to make. First I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly members of the International Association for Volunteer Effort conference steering committee who took part in a rally on the Legislature Grounds today. I'll ask them to stand as I introduce them. In the gallery are Krishan Joshee, Stan Fisher, Vern Colley, Peter Crosman, Dennis Fahlman, Tracey Geyer, Michael Warmington, Glynis Thomas, Bob Wyatt, and Georgette Thrasher. I would ask that all members give these volunteers a very warm welcome.

Also it is an honour and a pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the St. Albert Children's Theatre Festival Ensemble, who performed the official song of the international conference, *It Makes a Difference*. These young people represent the St. Albert Children's Theatre, a very talented young group. I would also like to introduce Janice Flower, artistic director with the theatre and songwriter of that official song. I tabled copies of that song earlier. Would you give all of these young people a warm welcome.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to introduce two very dear friends of mine. These two people were instrumental in ensuring that we had a very successful leadership process and an outstanding celebration on the weekend, when we chose our new leader. I would ask the president of our party, Rick Miller, and the executive director, Muriel Abdurahman, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

National Volunteer Week

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the beginning of a very special week in our country, National Volunteer Week. From April 19 to 25 communities across Alberta and Canada will show their appreciation for the millions of volunteers who donate their time, energy, and talents to making our country an even better place to live.

Earlier today I had the pleasure of attending a Volunteer Spirit Day rally to recognize some of Alberta's volunteers. They are a dedicated group of people who are helping to host the 1998 International Association for Volunteer Effort conference in Edmonton this August. Some of those volunteers I introduced earlier, including the very talented St. Albert Children's Theatre Festival Ensemble. The rally is one of many activities that are taking place across our province in all of our communities to thank volunteers who play such a vital role in our communities.

The Wild Rose Foundation in collaboration with Volunteer Alberta facilitates the provincial focus of Volunteer Week. This year a record 92 Alberta communities representing more than 2 million Albertans are participating in this weeklong series of events. Mr. Speaker, it is estimated that the volunteer community contributes \$1 billion to Alberta's economy each and every year and \$14 billion to our nation's economy. I think it's worth noting that our province has the highest rate of volunteering of any province in Canada. The tremendous strength of our volunteer force is one reason that Alberta was chosen as the first Canadian host of the international volunteer conference. This conference will give us a unique opportunity to showcase our volunteer sector leadership on an international level. It is being hosted by the Wild Rose Foundation, which provides tremendous support to Alberta's many volunteers and volunteer organizations.

Every day our volunteers demonstrate their commitment to making Alberta an even better place to live. They are truly the unsung heroes of communities. To each member of this Assembly, I encourage you to take time during National Volunteer Week to say a personal thank you to a volunteer who touches your life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to join the minister in recognizing National Volunteer Week and to express my thanks and that of the Liberal caucus to the tens of thousands of volunteers in Alberta who contribute immeasurably to our province's communities. It's not enough just to say that the spirit of volunteerism in Alberta is very strong. I would argue in fact that this spirit defines us as Albertans. Our communities, whether we're talking about neighbourhoods, charitable groups, arts and cultural groups, sports and recreation, social service helping agencies, simply could not be as successful as they have been without the willingness of Albertans to volunteer.

I disagree with the government's approach of quantifying everything, including the work done by volunteers, into a dollar figure. The value of our volunteers cannot be properly measured in this way. A strong community is measured by the dedication and commitment of people to that community.

In recent years we've seen downloading which has eroded our communities and put incredible pressures on the volunteer base in our province, but I have faith in the people of Alberta and respect for their commitment to their own communities. Therefore, I would like to join the minister in encouraging each and every one of you in this Assembly to take the time to say a thank you to the volunteers in your community.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: On behalf of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Private Health Services

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, this weekend I had an opportunity to talk with hundreds and hundreds of Albertans from every region of this province. The number one policy issue on their minds was this government's support of for-profit health care. Alberta Liberals share their concern and will do everything in our power to stop Bill 37, the government's privatization plan. My questions are to the Minister of Health. How is the approval of for-profit surgical facilities consistent with your government's stated policy of support for the Canada Health Act?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if, as I would conclude, the hon. member is referring to legislation which is being dealt with by the House – and that is Bill 37 – I think that piece of legislation is designed to be consistent with the Canada Health Act. It provides for controls in terms of the quality, the assurance of access to services. It provides for the involvement of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, as I've said, with respect to quality matters. It provides for protection of the public interest in terms of the overall health care system. So I think that piece of legislation is really following a number of issues that have been brought up previously in this House and on which there has been encouragement from both sides of the House to have appropriate legislation.

MR. SAPERS: Will the minister say what possible benefit Alberta's publicly funded, universal health care system will receive from your government's licensing private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, probably throughout the history of the health care system in this province and certainly also since the coming into being of the Canada Health Act and a public health

care system, we've had private facilities operating within the context of a public health care system. Probably one of the longest and it would seem successful entities would be the dental clinics, dental surgery. That's been part of and in compliance with the Canada Health Act for some time. Yes, we've had some issues with respect to billing procedures with respect to eye treatments, particularly cataract surgery, but the government moved to make sure that our overall policies were in compliance with the Canada Health Act in that particular respect, and this particular piece of legislation which is I think being alluded to strengthens our ability to do so.

1:50

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister can answer this. Why do Albertans need profit-driven surgical hospitals if it isn't to fill the gap that was created when you underfunded the public, universally accessible hospital system?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the premise on which the member's question is based of course is in my view not correct. Yes, health care, the health budget, along with education and other very important aspects of the government's delivery of services, were reduced in terms of their funding as our overall effort was important to balance the budget of this province and to address our debt.

Now, with respect to the priority the government has placed on the public health care system vis-à-vis funding, I think that is very well demonstrated by the announcements that have been made with respect to the overall increase or reinvestment in the health care system, the most recent announcement being the 66 millions of dollars of additional operational funding for regional health authorities, the capital money, the money for addressing the Y2K issue in this province.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, the lack of commitment to public health is demonstrated by wait lists right around this province in every health care and hospital facility.

Mr. Speaker, one of the key defences that the government has marshalled in trying to justify its health care privatization policy is that it's similar to the law in Ontario. In my left hand I'm holding the 68-page Ontario Independent Health Facilities Act. In my right hand I'm holding all seven pages of the Alberta Health Statutes Amendment Act, 1998. My question is to the Minister of Health. For all of those Albertans who are wondering why he left out all of the key safeguards to protect public health care in Bill 37, I'd ask him this: why has the government not included the range of checks and balances that exist in the Ontario legislation to prevent wholesale privatization of our health care system?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the quality of legislation is something similar to the length of speeches, and that is that the length is not always proportionate to quality. I'm sure the opposition members would know about that.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the document that the member waved with respect to Ontario, as I remember that document, it is an overall document which has all the committees, the procedures, and so forth that are involved in their private hospitals commission. Certainly, along with our legislation it would be necessary to have the appropriate regulations, which the member would probably be glad to know would probably fill quite a few more pages.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, why has this government left approval of private hospitals in its bill entirely up to a single minister with only four very vague criteria? Who is going to protect the public interest when it comes to health care?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister, of course, is only one person who is the minister of the Crown and responsible to the cabinet and caucus that makes up the government. The government of course is well placed on record and we've emphasized our commitment to ensuring that there is a good public health care system in this province and that we adhere to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

MR. DICKSON: Why is the minister rushing to pass such a dangerous law as Bill 37 with no public consultation, with no public debate? Will the minister join me at the Inn on 7th at 7 p.m. to debate the purpose and the effect of Bill 37?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to just make a comment on the opportunity that there has already been in this House to debate the principles of Bill 37. I would like to indicate that I am certainly open to something constructive from the people across the way, but when I looked over the *Hansard* account of the degree of second reading that we've had, I see some very general statements, some claims this way and that way. I think there's very little recognition being given in the debate to the specific and I think very strong measures that are being taken within the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the invitation to go to the Inn on 7th, I can assure the hon. member that I do have . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You're on duty.

MR. JONSON: Well, I'm on duty, yes, but also over the supper hour I have some very important discussions to attend to as well. I will be at the Inn on 7th, though, much later on in the evening.

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

Health Care System

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been an increasing, escalating pattern of job action in health care as a result of this government's rigid underfunding of the system. Previous to this government there had been a pattern of planning, consultation, and respect for health care professionals as embodied in The Rainbow Report and reforms undertaken by the hon. Nancy MacBeth. Currently, doctors are protesting long hours of work and insufficient supports by closing their offices throughout this province. My first question is to the Minister of Health. Why has your government put people's health, even their lives at stake by underfunding and overworking this province's professionals to the point where they are continually forced to take job action?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I have repeatedly indicated inside and outside of the House, the government, Alberta Health, the minister, and our negotiating team have been ready to resume negotiations, and I am pleased to indicate that over the past few days discussions have resumed, and I think they are progressing. We have always stood ready to negotiate. Now with the co-

operation of the Alberta Medical Association in this effort we are working at the overall agreement coming to a suitable conclusion.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When do you think those talks will come to a suitable conclusion? After there's more job action? Or will it happen this week?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm just indicating – and I think that really this is the important thing – that every effort is now being made on both sides to hopefully come to a conclusion with respect to this overall negotiation matter.

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

MR. MacDONALD: I have a third question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister commit to this House this afternoon to increase health care funding to the levels requested by the regional health authorities all across the province? [interjections]

MR. JONSON: Possibly . . .

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. I may have caused that, but the hon. Minister of Health has the floor.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, possibly the hon. member has missed a few days somewhere in the deliberations of this Assembly and other events, but as indicated many days ago, the Premier had indicated on behalf of the government that we would review the overall regional health authority funding. We did have a series of meetings including a meeting with the Council of Chairs, a meeting with the CEOs. I would just like to announce this for the hon. member. We did announce an increase of some 66 millions of dollars in operational funding for regional health authorities, which matches within .1 percentage point what their suggested increase would be.

2:00

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, Bill 37 is about double-dipping. Private, for-profit hospitals want to pad their profits by dipping into the publicly funded health care system. The Minister of Health said on April 2 right here, "The College of Physicians and Surgeons has been consulted and regards this as progressive and good legislation." My question to the Health minister is this: how can he justify making that statement about the college's so-called support when some members of the college council have publicly expressed grave concern about the bill and the college president said that they have given no official response and are concerned that there has been no public discussion?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I stand by my previous statement with respect to those sections of Bill 37 which pertain to the jurisdiction of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. One of the aspects of the bill – and I know I'm getting into specifics here – was that at one point in time the issue of whether or not to approve a private facility to function seemed to fall solely upon the College of Physicians and Surgeons because we did not have any legislative structure as a provincial government to deal with these matters. This particular piece of legislation provides that structure, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons were supportive of that.

MS BARRETT: Not the bill though.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister explain to Albertans why Albertans should trust that he has the interests of public medicare in mind when he is a member of a political party that received almost a quarter of a million dollars in donations from private health care companies and investors since 1993, including \$10,000 from HRG and its investors?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the flow of political contributions I think the hon. member is referring to the list of the Progressive Conservative Party. I think that to put things into context one should probably look at the lists of all parties. Nevertheless, whether it occurred or didn't occur had nothing to do with and no impact upon the drafting of this legislation.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister to respond to this question with a yes or a no. Will he commit on behalf of his government to prohibit private, for-profit hospitals double-dipping into the publicly funded health care system? Yes or no?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this phrase "double-dipping," if it is defined by the hon. member the way I would, the legislation does prevent that.

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

Children's Services

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The early intervention program was brought into effect in 1995 to provide funding for preventive and integrated services developed by communities. My questions are to the minister responsible for children's services. What is the purpose of the current review process that is under way on the local projects funded under this program?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, to allay any fears out there, we do monitor and evaluate all projects continuously throughout the years that they've been in progress. However, the review that we are doing now is to help determine which projects should continue to receive funding from the \$17 million that has been allocated to me for the 1998-99 budget.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you. Well then, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister responsible for children's services if she would please outline the timing and also give us the criteria for this review process.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, we plan to complete the review and advise all projects of funding decisions no later than the end of May.

On the second portion of the question, relative to the criteria, we are wanting to ensure that we are achieving good outcomes for children and families. We are also wanting to make sure that we are consistent with government goals and departmental goals and that they are going according to child and family services authorities, and we want to make sure they are managed in an effective and efficient way.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then I would ask: can the minister please tell me why some of the programs in some of our constituencies and those who are organizing them are

calling me to ask why their school-based projects are being cut at the end of April when you've indicated that the assessment process is not yet completed?

MS CALAHASEN: That's an excellent question, Mr. Speaker. What I'd like to say at this stage is that it's probably because we've been doing a review, and we've had people out there going out to do all the reviews that are required to be able to identify the projects. I will say, however, that there's been no decision made as to which projects will go ahead and which ones will not. At this stage of the game, I'd like to assure the Member for St. Albert that until we finish the thorough review, there'll be no decision made, and then we will ensure that all school-based projects will be continued until the end of June so that they don't get disturbed. Once we've made the final decision, that decision will be brought forward.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Highwood.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, in January of 1996 this government sold its 40 percent interest in the Swan Hills plant to Bovar at a loss of \$441 million to Alberta taxpayers, but a provision in that sales agreement said that Albertans would share in future profits of the Swan Hills plant. Bovar's latest annual report states that the province's share of profits from this plant was a nominal amount for both 1996 and 1997. Taxpayers simply want to know how much they can expect back from this investment of \$441 million. So my question is to the hon. Provincial Treasurer. Since our return on this investment was only \$23,600 for 1996, how much did Alberta taxpayers receive on this \$441 million investment for 1997?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it was actually \$23,500 for '96, representing 40 percent of our share of the net profit, according to the agreement. All indications are the first quarter of '97 saw a loss in the particular operation. As I understand it, as they moved into the second quarter, things were looking better, and it looked like some profit may have been coming at that point until their recent difficulty. So, so far, the answer would be zero for '97.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Treasurer. So we won't be even getting one single sweat-soaked loony for 1997?

MR. DAY: It doesn't appear that way. That's correct.

THE SPEAKER: And that was your question. I'm sorry. Under our rules you're going now to your third question.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: That's correct. I just wanted it confirmed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will Alberta taxpayers be on the hook for an additional \$57 million in site cleanup costs possibly as early as January 1 of 1999?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct. There is some potential responsibility that could be burdened onto the government there. If, for instance, according to the agreement, the government were to prevent waste coming from outside the province, to pass something so no more waste could come into

that particular operation, then Bovar would have the opportunity actually to hand the operation back to government. If other operators were allowed to come in in contravention of the particular agreement, then there would be a similar reversion of that particular facility back to the government.

The amount that's there in terms of the performance bond if Bovar decided to unilaterally just pull out and leave us with the facility, that transfers back for a dollar. But, in fact, there's about \$18 million there remaining in the performance bond. So there's a number of things that could take place, some of which, in fact, would be a burden to the taxpayer.

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

2:10 **Cougar Control**

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Environmental Protection. This fall and winter a number of cougars in my constituency have been terrorizing ranchers west of Nanton. The cougars have even come into the yards of residents and killed dogs. Several people have been stalked by cougars, and one lady was actually attacked by a cougar. Children are particularly at risk when they walk to or from or stand at a school bus stop. My question, then, to the minister: why aren't these ranchers allowed to shoot the cougars who are threatening their animals and their families?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member bringing this issue forward. It's getting to be somewhat of a worry and a major concern to us. The cougar population in the province has expanded dramatically. Their range has expanded, and we're finding conflicts in more areas all the time.

As far as being able to shoot a cougar, currently under the Wildlife Act it's against the law to shoot an animal without a licence. Now, of course, in common law if a person is in danger, then the animal could be destroyed. However, under any of those circumstances there would be a full investigation of the incident. I would highly recommend that if ranchers or other people are having problems with cougars, they contact the fish and wildlife offices near them and see if there isn't something we can do to remove the animal.

As far as compensation for loss of livestock, there is the possibility of receiving some compensation for livestock that are taken by cougars.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is again to the Minister of Environmental Protection. Given that at least one lady was attacked by a cougar, does the minister prescribe the three-S solution for ranchers to protect their families?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, if a human is in danger or attacked, then that animal could be destroyed, but there would be an investigation of the killing of a cougar without a licence.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental, again to the same minister: would the minister, then, commit to permitting an expansion of cougar hunting licences on a localized basis where the circumstances such as exist in the Nanton area warrant an increase? Would he be willing to support an emergency quota system?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, as that question was being asked, I heard from across the way from Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition: no, no, no. Well, I've already asked our staff to look into the situation to see if in fact there should be an increased hunt in some of the areas. Throughout the province we have a massive increase in the cougar population, and as they move out into the interface with the settled area, we're going to have these problems. So we are going to be looking at how we can address this situation.

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

School Achievement Tests

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Citing misuse of test results, parents at a Calgary elementary school are refusing to let their children write government achievement tests. Eight out of 10 teachers report these tests have come to have either a negative impact or no impact on planning instruction for children. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What action is the minister taking to ensure that the achievement tests are not being misused and causing harmful student stress and hostile competition among elementary schools?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a question that does raise some issues of concern. We do want to make sure that achievement tests continue to operate and that they are used in an appropriate manner. Achievement tests were introduced in 1982, and they are an important building block in ensuring that we continue to have a very good education system.

I think some parents have raised an issue with respect to the stress that is placed upon young students in writing these at the grade 3 level. I wish to point out that in grade 3 the exams are written only in two areas: first of all in mathematics and, secondly, in reading and writing. Now, in each case the test for mathematics is multiple choice. It takes about an hour to complete. With the reading and writing portions, it's in two parts. One part takes place in May, and one part takes place in June. Each part of reading and writing takes roughly an hour.

We do publish guides for parents so that they know what the achievement tests are for and to provide them with advice on how to allow their children to be most comfortable with these examinations. The examinations are very, very important. We encourage parents to allow their children to write those examinations.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the purpose of the achievement test program is to identify program weaknesses, will the government consider returning to the previous practice of sampling students across the province?

MR. MAR: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is no, because not only do achievement tests provide us with important feedback on how we should be doing provincially, but they also provide a measurement of how individual students are doing against a provincial standard. This is part of our accountability. Parents want to know: how is my son or daughter doing compared to the provincial standard? That's an important piece of feedback, and that is the reason we will continue with achievement tests with as wide a number of students writing as possible.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same

minister: with classrooms overcrowded, textbook shortages, a lack of computers, how can the government justify spending 2 and a half million dollars on a testing program that parents and many teachers see little value in?

MR. MAR: Well, quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. Our achievement test program has not only been recognized by educators throughout this province as being a very important aspect of accountability and a building block to curriculum, to textbooks, to improving our programs; it's also a model that has been recognized nationally and internationally.

Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to refer the hon. member to the results of examinations that our students take in comparison to other jurisdictions of Canada and other parts of the world. Alberta students do exceptionally well. These types of examinations in all grades are important examinations to take on an individual basis. It helps schools, it helps school jurisdictions, and it helps the province. These examinations are here to stay.

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Along the same lines as the previous series of questions, a number of parents in Calgary have indicated that they may boycott provincial achievement tests this spring. It has also been indicated that Alberta Education could in fact be forced to invalidate achievement test results if enough parents in a school participated in the boycott. My question, then, to the Minister of Education is: is the provincial achievement test program itself going to be in jeopardy, particularly in those schools where there's a low participation rate?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I want to strongly emphasize that parents should very carefully think twice before preventing their children from participating, because these examinations provide feedback for how their sons or daughters are doing, because these tests are based on the Alberta curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, teachers are great experimenters, and I say that in a very positive way. Teachers are always looking for new ways to teach kids the material, because as teachers will tell you, the purpose of professional development is that if kids don't learn the way you teach, you'd better teach the way they learn. Now, having said that, at the end of the year parents will want to know, regardless of which method of teaching a teacher employs, that their sons, their daughters know the curriculum.

2:20

I think parents that say there's too much stress being placed on these children in writing these examinations do a disservice to their children because in my view it's important for children to become accustomed to the process of evaluation that will continue with them for the rest of their lives. Furthermore, there are exceptions for writing, and superintendents have the ability to exempt children from writing the examinations if it is not in the best interests of the child. But generally speaking these examinations are important to individuals, to schools, to school jurisdictions, and to the province.

MS GRAHAM: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for those remarks, and I have no further questions.

Parks and Recreation Areas

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, the government fails to recognize that provincial parks and recreation areas benefit Albertans and the tourism industry in ways that are not necessarily reflected in park revenues. Many parks have already been privatized, but the future of others is still uncertain. As the letter I am tabling shows, recreation facility sites for which no operator is found must be barricaded and closed by March 1, 1998. Where negotiations are still under way, the sites are to be kept open. Will the Minister of Environmental Protection tell us how those in charge are to keep the parks open pending completion of negotiations when they have been given no budget to do so?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the privatization of the facilities by either contracting to a contractor directly or using a facility operator has been going on for a number of years. As a matter of fact, going into last year, some 92 percent of the sites either had a contractor or a facility operator. There are some difficult sites that we've been working on to complete the transfer to the private sector. However, I think it is also very important to notice that the government is currently spending some \$28 million on parks. Granted, the bulk of that we want to spend on the heritage sites. Those, of course, do account for around 98 percent of the land base, so that's where we want to spend our money. But we have to ask the basic question: is it the government's responsibility to provide someplace for somebody to camp overnight?

MS CARLSON: It's too bad he didn't ask that question of the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister keep Hasse Lake provincial park open and find the revenue to operate it, as he has decided to do with Sylvan Lake provincial park? After all, what's the difference between the two parks? Tell us here today, Mr. Minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That little exchange – I didn't catch the name of the park that the hon. member asked about. The hon. member will be very pleased to know that we have concluded an agreement whereby the Hasse park will continue to be open.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. Will the minister agree not to tear down facilities at sites that are scheduled for closure until he has consulted the public across Alberta about the privatization and closure policy? We're losing valuable assets across this province with his policy.

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the opposition have to write those questions out and can't listen to the answers, because clearly I indicated in the answer to the first question that some 92 percent of the sites – going into last year and over the course of the winter, we have been able to get many, many more sites operated by the private sector. So I think it's being accepted by the public, and we will see as we move forward.

But it's real interesting. I had one person who came to me last year and said how they hoped we wouldn't privatize that campsite. Well, the fact was that it had been operated by a private operator for five years.

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

Youth Crime

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a recent town hall meeting in my constituency youth crime continues to be a matter of concern to my constituents. It seems that like Albertans and like all Canadians they look to the justice system to provide stability and safety. However, many people within my riding don't believe this is happening when it comes to dealing with young offenders committing criminal acts. To the Minister of Justice: what is your position on making changes to the Young Offenders Act?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you for the question. First of all, Mr. Speaker, I understand how many Albertans feel about the Young Offenders Act in general. In fact, a recent Angus Reid survey, I think conducted last year, indicated that only 13 percent of those Albertans surveyed actually supported the act in its present form. I don't believe it's because they don't understand; I believe it's because the act is not working properly.

The Young Offenders Act has been in effect for 14 years, and during that time there have been a number of amendments, Mr. Speaker. In the past provincial governments have not always supported those amendments nor have the amendments necessarily reflected provincial input. We have always felt that the primary aim of the criminal justice system should be the protection of society and the protection of communities, and in that regard we've made very strong representations to the federal government when appropriate to change the act to achieve that goal, to ensure that our communities are protected.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the same minister. What exactly are you asking in the way of changes to toughen the Young Offenders Act?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, we feel the Young Offenders Act should reflect the realities of youth crime, and as I mentioned earlier, protection of the community should be a priority. We have raised a number of measures with the federal government. In fact, we raised a number of issues in conjunction with Prince Edward Island, Ontario, and Manitoba at the last federal/provincial justice ministers meeting. I would like to fill the House in on some of the changes that we recommended.

We would like to make it easier to transfer serious and chronic offenders to adult court. We would like to require youth who are transferred to adult court to have the same parole requirements as adult offenders. We feel that for those who are either committing serious or violent crimes or are chronic, repeat offenders, there should be the publishing of their identities so the community knows who they are. We would also support making young offenders pay victim surcharges. We feel, for example, access to the legal aid system should be available only to those young offenders whose parents or themselves cannot afford to pay for counsel, and we feel, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that these changes will allow us to deal more effectively with those young offenders who are chronic offenders or who commit serious or violent crimes.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. Given that it seems to take the federal government forever to make changes, what else is being done to work on the problem of youth crime?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the criminal legislation will not solve the problem entirely. Greater community involvement is one of the key elements to ensure that youth do not commit offences. We support the development of alternatives to incarceration in our system. We would like to look at changes to the minor offence categories. We are very supportive of youth justice committees, for example, and we must continue to develop innovative programs at the community level to ensure that those young people who have actually gone astray and have committed an offence do not do so in the future. We need to ensure that when they leave our institutions, there is something there for them, and I am working with the Minister of Community Development in that regard to look at some new programming. We feel that if we look at alternatives to incarceration plus the changes we would like to see made to the Young Offenders Act, that will go a long way towards resolving some of the problems associated with youth crime.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Career and Life Management

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. High school students, parents, educators, and counsellors have concerns about the future of the career and life management high school course of study, better known as CALM. Recently Alberta Liberals have heard from the Edmonton Regional Guidance Council and concerned citizens from Lord Beaverbrook high school in Calgary about the possible elimination of the career and life management course. To the Minister of Education: will the career and life management course remain mandatory for high school students?

2:30

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the career and life management program of curriculum is one which has had mixed reviews throughout the province of Alberta. It is those mixed reviews from educators, counsellors, school principals, and students themselves, who asked the good question, "Why do we have to take this?" – it is questions like that that have prompted us to review the appropriateness of CALM. In some school jurisdictions there has been great support expressed for CALM and its contents, and in other jurisdictions there has been lukewarm to cool response to the continuation of the program as a mandatory graduation requirement. But before we make any decisions about changing the status of CALM, we will continue with our consultation with teachers, with parents, and not the least of which, we will continue our consultation with students as well to determine what the future of the CALM curriculum should be.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, why would the government even consider dropping CALM given that it provides our young people with basic practical skills and knowledge?

MR. MAR: Well, again, there've been mixed reviews on CALM. If in fact CALM provides the types of skills that the hon. member has referred to, then it should have great take-up and great enthusiasm by students who actually take the course. The possibility is that we could make CALM an optional part of the curriculum, not make it mandatory for graduation. That's a possibility, Mr. Speaker. It's also a possibility that we could continue it in the manner in which it is right now.

Mr. Speaker, in high schools right now we only have high

school kids for 1,000 hours of instruction in grades 10 through 12. There are continuous pressures on what should be mandatory within that 1,000 hours of instruction and what should be optional. There are many good programs, many good elements of curriculum that make up part of our high school program. CALM is one of those things, but there are many pressures on making other parts of our curriculum mandatory.

Some people have suggested that physical education, as an example, should be mandatory all the way through grade 12. No doubt, people would make the argument that that is an important thing to do as a life skill. The question is: is that the most appropriate thing or the most important thing that should make up that 1,000 hours of instruction? CALM will go through exactly the same kind of review as we have for all other elements of our curriculum to determine whether it should be optional or mandatory.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, what alternatives to CALM has the minister's department brought forward that would ensure that every high school student receives career and life management skills?

MR. MAR: Well, again, I'm not doubting that there are good skills that can be learned from CALM when it is taught by a teacher that is enthusiastic and interested in the area. But, Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, I must say that there has been mixed reaction to CALM. A lot of it depends upon the particular teacher and the enthusiasm that the school has for teaching that particular program. But if there is such great value in CALM, then that in and of itself should sell the program. Even if it were not mandatory, those parents that recognize the good skills that can be taught to their sons and daughters and those students themselves who recognize the importance of acquiring the types of skills that one would learn from the CALM program – that in and of itself should make the program viable and likely to continue even if it is within the regime of optional programs as opposed to mandatory ones.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Criminal Justice System

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recently the justice system witnessed two very frightening incidents. In my riding of Livingstone-Macleod residents were absolutely outraged with the release of two people charged with beating a senior citizen to death, and in central Alberta in an unrelated matter two men supposedly serving prison sentences got away, and crime followed. My constituents are frightened, and some are furious about the chain of events. So my question is to the Minister of Justice. Can you tell my constituents what is going on in these events?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all I'd like to express that I, too, am concerned about what has happened in the case referred to in the member's riding. It is still before the courts; therefore, I am limited in what I can say.

I can advise the members of the House that the two individuals were charged with first degree murder and that the Crown vigorously opposed release of both individuals. After hearing argument on behalf of both sides, the two accused were released on a number of stringent conditions. It is the view of the

prosecutors who conducted the case that there are no grounds for appeal, and the reason for the decision was that the justice involved considered all the relevant facts and made his decision by applying legal principles based on precedent.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question to the same minister: do you intend to pursue this matter of concern in Pincher Creek, where two accused were recently back on the streets, one with no bail and the other with a bail of \$1,000 for a charge of murder?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, in terms of the Pincher Creek case, it is still before the courts, and again caution must be exercised about any comment.

I can tell the House, however, Mr. Speaker, that I recommended to my federal and provincial counterparts earlier this year that the Criminal Code be amended to permit a further right of appeal to interim release decisions made by justices of the Court of Queen's Bench. At the present time, the Crown can only appeal such a decision if there has been an error in law or a material change in circumstance. That recommendation is presently being reviewed by a working group of senior criminal justice officials from across the country.

MR. COUTTS: A final question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: is there anything else that will happen because of the Bowden scare, or is it now just simply up to the courts?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, the situation in Bowden is a different matter. It involved two individuals who were federal offenders. One was on day parole; the other was on an outside work program. That's when they went missing from those programs. As the House is aware, both have been recaptured and are likely facing criminal charges.

Following the police investigation, the federal government ordered an inquiry, Mr. Speaker. It's a board of investigation that was announced by the Correctional Service of Canada. It should provide some answers for the prevention of similar occurrences. In the meantime, the matter does remain before the courts; therefore, I am restricted again in what I can say.

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

THE SPEAKER: From time to time, hon. members, matters respecting the courts and the law come to this House. There is no way that the Speaker is in a position to determine what is sub judice or not sub judice. I must rely on the judgment of the Minister of Justice with respect to these matters. So when questions are directed to the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Justice chooses to respond to them, he in essence is setting a type of precedent in place. On the basis of the questions today, it may very well lead to questions of the Minister of Justice in the future, and the Minister of Justice may not necessarily be able to use the argument of sub judice on the basis of what happened today.

Hon. Minister of Justice, I never said that it would be used, that it would violate sub judice. I'm in your hands in terms of what is sub judice or not. But it's also the responsibility of the hon. member raising the question to try and determine that as well. This is one of these fine lines we have to be very, very careful of.

I'd invite a comment. Sure.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am

concerned about the issue of sub judice. What I attempted simply to do today was respond on a factual basis to the question that was raised. I believe most of the information if not all the information I gave is in the general public. The public is aware of it. So certainly I kept that in mind when responding.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you.

Hon. members, 30 seconds will go by and we'll begin the process of recognitions.

2:40 Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon members, seven members today have indicated their desire to participate in recognitions. We will proceed on this basis. First of all, the hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray, then the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, then the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and then the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Jack and Gladys McLay

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize two of my constituents, Jack and Gladys McLay of Namao. They have square-danced their way to national recognition. At the national square-dancing convention held in Edmonton this past summer, it was announced that they were the oldest couple square-dancing in Canada. Jack and Gladys ran a mixed farming operation, where they raised three children: Audrey, Robert, and Ross. Although retired from farming, the energetic couple have no plans to stop dancing and do so for exercise and the friendships. The McLays will be celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary later this summer. Congratulations.

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

Anniversary of Women's Suffrage

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize the women elected to this Chamber, and I'd like to recognize the 52 percent of the voters who are women. These two things go together because both became a possibility on April 19, 1916, when the then Liberal government passed the women's suffrage act. So as of yesterday women have had the vote in Alberta for 82 years. Alberta was the first among the provinces to hold an election in which women could vote. That happened in June 1917, and that same day in 1917 Alberta elected its first woman to this Chamber. We are improving in our representation. In 1989, 15 women were elected; in 1993, 19 women elected; in 1997, 22 women elected. Please join me in saluting the women who vote and the women who serve as elected officials and our 82nd anniversary in doing so.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Syncrude's Billionth Barrel

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Thursday, April 16, Syncrude Canada, the oil sands producer located in Fort McMurray, produced its billionth barrel of high quality Syncrude oil, six years ahead of its 25-year schedule. It's quite an accomplishment and a testament to the people involved with the

Syncrude project. Very few companies have produced a billion barrels, and fewer have done it so quickly. This is truly a 20-year Canadian success story, as reported by Peter C. Newman of the national magazine *Maclean's*.

The billionth barrel comes six years ahead of this 25-year schedule at a cost of \$13 per barrel. Back in 1978 the actual cost of a barrel of crude was \$30 per barrel. This is really a testament to all the employees, past and present, who've been involved with the Syncrude project.

The oil sands deposited in Fort McMurray and the region has 1.7 trillion barrels of crude, five times larger than that of Saudi Arabia. I'd like to commend the workers and all the employees; its chairman, Eric Newell; its president, Jim Carter; and all members of the management team. I look forward to the second announcement.

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

Drug Abuse Resistance Education

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 16 it was my pleasure to attend the Ronald Harvey school grade 6 DARE graduation. DARE stands for drug abuse resistance education. This is a program that involves co-operation between the police, school, and parents. Constable Barry MacIntyre from the St. Albert RCMP detachment gave 17 lessons to the two grade 6 classes, and in that length of time the students learned a great deal about how to say no to drugs, alcohol, and violence. The crowd gave Constable MacIntyre a standing ovation to show him what an impact he has had on our students' lives.

These programs do not happen unless the school staff and parents get involved. My congratulations to Mrs. Patty Klak and Mr. Trent Walters for all their work to make this program a success at Ronald Harvey. The parents, family members, and friends of the grade 6 DARE graduates enjoyed an evening of skits, songs, essays, and personal comments from the students about what they have learned from the DARE program and their commitment to stay drug and violence free. My congratulations to Ronald Harvey school and all the other schools across this province that are involved with the DARE program.

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

Organ and Tissue Donation Awareness Week

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. April 19 to 25 is National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week. On behalf of my colleague the MLA for Stony Plain and minister of public works I would like to recognize two of his constituents. The first is Brian Carter, who went to the U of A hospital in April of '97. He was in hospital for two months waiting for a new heart, which he was lucky enough to receive on June 8, '97. He was able to go home eight days later, just in time to see his son play his last baseball game of the season. Brian became president of Clymont in February of 1998. He would not be here today without his donor.

Wayne Halabisky, after waiting three years, received a new heart in March of 1998. He spent two weeks recovering in the hospital and went bike riding to his neighbour's place two days later. Wayne was president of Clymont for six years prior to being placed on the transplant list.

Wayne's family and Brian's family cannot say enough in

appreciation to the donor families for their very generous donations of life.

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

Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the Millwoods Welcome Centre for Immigrants located in my constituency. This centre is a community-based initiative for settlement involving three agency partners: Catholic Social Services, the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, and the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. Co-ordinated by Dr. Laura Ho, the Millwoods welcome centre provides a variety of services for newcomers. The centre is exploring a model of settlement which is community based. To this end, staff are working to establish links with community partners to facilitate the integration of newcomers in the community.

Services include settlement assistance, employment counseling and training, home-based business training, language assessment and educational planning, homework club, citizenship classes, and preschool literacy. The centre has been in operation since January 1998 and is funded as a pilot project by Citizenship and Immigration Canada as well as the Department of Canadian Heritage. Since January the centre has served more than 300 newcomers to the Mill Woods area. One of the areas that centre staff has been active in is increasing community awareness of newcomers. We appreciate their hard work in the community.

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

St. Albert Saints

MRS. O'NEILL: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The St. Albert Saints hockey team are the 1998 champions of the Alberta Junior Hockey League. I would like to personally congratulate the members of the team and to read their names. They are Scott Kabotoff, Doug Strobl, Calvin Burton, Rob Ziemmer, Andrew Gibson, Cam Kuzyk, Mike Buchan, Kyle Saranchuk, Brent Robertson, Jamie Lundmark, Jeebo Manah, Mike Klassen, David Hukalo, Marc Collins, Brent Hill, Grant Nicol, Tim Lozinik, Bill Russell, Paul Esdale, Mike Comrie, Ryan Edwards, Kris Liber, Jason Schaefer, and Nathan Kerbes.

I'd like to congratulate these young men and wish them well in the western Canadian championship, which they trust they will embark upon shortly, and I'd like to congratulate their coaches, their trainers, and certainly their organizers as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Before calling Orders of the Day, hon. members may appreciate this following information. In addition to April 19 to 26 being National Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness Week, which has already been mentioned, and April 19 to 25 being Volunteer Week, hon. members may also be delighted to know that April is Canadian Cancer Society Month, International Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month, National Dental Health Month, and Parkinson's Awareness Month. April 18 to 26 is Earth Week. April 19 to 25 is National Soil Conservation Week. April 22 is Earth Day. April 22 is Professional Secretaries Day. April 23 is Canada Book Day. April 23 is also St. George's Day. April 24 to May 10 are Girl Guide Sandwich Cookie Weeks. April 25 is Law Day, and April 25 is also the Super Cities Walk in Lethbridge.

head: Orders of the Day
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Second Reading
2:50 Bill 39
Financial Administration Amendment Act, 1998

[Adjourned debate April 9: Mr. Day]

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if someone wishes to speak on behalf of the hon. Treasurer, but if it's the House's wish, I'll just proceed with some of my comments.

THE SPEAKER: You've already been recognized. Please proceed.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I rise then to speak directly to Bill 39, that being the Financial Administration Amendment Act. Once again I want to thank the Provincial Treasurer for having provided us with a technical briefing. Again we see a spirit of some co-operation with respect to certain bills that are presented in this House and a certain spirit that I would like to suggest should be exercised more often by all ministers of the House in an effort to better acquaint all members, in particular opposition critics, with what the contents of the forthcoming bill are and also with an intention to exchange information and ideas in the hopes of fleshing out certain shortcomings that may be noted or certain suggestions which we would like to make, all of that having the intention of speeding up the processes in the House when possible and also helping to move some important legislation through the House more smoothly.

Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill 39 has as its central feature the extension of life, as it were, for certain provincial agencies. As a result of that particular main thrust I find no problem with supporting it at this stage, although we may at a subsequent stage be looking at a few amendments. In particular, amendments are of course allowed during Committee of the Whole, so that's the more appropriate place to address those amendments. Nonetheless, in addition to extending the existence of some of these provincial agencies as well as certain subsidiaries of provincial agencies, we also recognize that there are some new aspects to the bill, which I will be commenting on.

However, before I get into those comments, I want to just explain my understanding of the circumstances that led up to this bill and why I can see myself supporting it. In a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, this bill is necessitated to review the current sunset provisions that govern these so-called provincial agencies. Recognizing that there are nearly 80 or so of these provincial agencies, all of whom perform a very specific and needed function within the greater role of government, I will be favourably disposed to their continuance.

There are other provisions within the bill that speak specifically to extending the life span of these provincial agencies from the current sunset period of January 1, 1999, forward to approximately January 1, 2004, or possibly sooner than that date if the agencies expire through some other natural cause or if they are disestablished because of their usefulness perhaps having been already served or their mandate accomplished or if they are wound up for some other reason. The conclusion of all that, Mr. Speaker, of course is that if there is no further need or use for one

of these provincial agencies, then why indeed should we have it continued? I certainly support that particular thinking provided, of course, that we've had opportunity to discuss the needs for their discontinuance or that we are clearly made aware of the job they were supposed to have done and how well it was done, how well the mission was accomplished, and how much the stakeholders' input was taken into account prior to dissolution and so on. I believe in streamlining of government as well as in cost-cutting measures and I believe in avoiding duplication but not at the sacrifice of vital services. I would hope that most, if not all, members would concur with that basic premise that really fuels the thrust of this particular bill.

So in specific reference to the agencies that we're talking about – and I think it's important to note that by “agencies” we are using that as a generic term to apply to many of the provincial corporations and/or any provincial subcommittees that are created or established through the Financial Administration Act and continued through this act that in particular deal with the receipt and/or administration of moneys on behalf of Alberta taxpayers and, in particular, on behalf of the Alberta Treasury coffers.

As I look through the bill, Mr. Speaker, which basically is about nine or 10 pages in length, I think we would agree that eight and a half or nine of those pages are simply a statement by specific title of the various agencies that are being continued. I note, for example, under part 1 that we're extending a series of agencies under the Ministry of Advanced Education and Career Development. I think all of those are important, but I would like to highlight the Students Finance Board, which is being continued under section 2 of the Students Finance Act – I think that's extremely important – as well as the Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, the Private Vocational Schools Advisory Council, and a number of others.

Under part 2, where we're extending the life span of provincial agencies that come under the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, I think it's important to note here, too, that these agencies and their subsidiaries provide extremely important information and financing to certain of our agriculturally driven areas of the province, such as the Alberta Dairy Control Board, the Irrigation Council, the Land Compensation Board, the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council, and the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, all of whom have a very specific function they perform to help the agriculture, food, and rural economy of our province. So we can understand the need to see some of those continued.

Under another debate at another time I would like additional clarification of specifically some of the loans that flow out of some of these areas in terms of the amounts of money they put forward, how those loans are monitored and reported on and what the success rate of collection of those loans is all about as well as the rates at which they are collected. I think that's important information for us to understand so that we can draw a clear delineation between where the government of Alberta is or is not still in the business of being in business. Again, I say if at all, because I realize it's perhaps not all that clear on first reading.

Under part 3 of the bill we're talking about the Ministry of Community Development and some of the provincial agencies that need to be continued. I'm certainly very happy to see there that the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which is now an amalgamated group reflecting the visual arts, the performing arts, and the written creative arts, is extended. I think that's a good move.

MR. MAR: Literary arts.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I meant to say literary arts. Thank you, hon. minister.

Also, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation is one I've had a lot of dealings with over the years, and I'm happy to see it continued, along with the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, which is continued here but is still one that I would like to suggest should have greater independence than simply being in the direct control of one single minister. It's always been my feeling, Mr. Speaker, that the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, as described under the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, would indeed be a much more effective body and perhaps I'd go so far as to say a much more accountable body if in fact it reported to the entire Legislature, to all 83 members in other words, instead of just to one single minister. However, we'll fight that battle further perhaps at another time.

3:00

Under this same section, part 3 of the bill, I also note the continuance of the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, the Seniors Advisory Council, and the Wild Rose Foundation, which is another very good organization that does wonderful things in term of encouraging volunteer participation and in fact was introduced earlier this day by the Minister of Community Development with respect to the Volunteer '98 conference, which is being convened here in the city of Edmonton. That conference alone and all of the volunteers that are expected to arrive from around the world will make a significant impact, I'm sure, on our local economy. It also tends to point up the extremely important role that our volunteers play in the province of Alberta and elsewhere. It will provide a good forum, I expect, for a lot of exchanging of ideas. I'm very happy to see that it is being continued under this particular act, along with other entities such as the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, which we refer to usually as AADAC, and of course the Alberta Order of Excellence Council and the Government House Foundation.

I think parts 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 through 17 and through to conclusion I will not take up the House's time to reiterate or restate. Suffice it to say that having looked at all of these different agencies, I can certainly support them being continued. Many of them deal with the area of Health, and others are with respect to Education, Family and Social Services, Aboriginal Affairs, Labour, Justice, into science, research, and technology, as well as Utilities, Treasury, Municipal Affairs, and on and on. Suffice it to say, Mr. Speaker, that those are entities that are all performing an important job within the greater development and diversification aspects of our Alberta economy.

I would like to, however, comment on one particular point of the bill and ask the Treasurer for some clarification of this and perhaps consider it as being a highlight. Maybe the question is better placed as being: is there a mistake on page 2 of the bill, the second paragraph from the top? Just to go back to page 1, it says here that “section 81.1 is amended.” We're talking about the Financial Administration Act which is being amended, and it speaks specifically to subsection (9)(i) of section 81.1 of the Financial Administration Act. So I went into the Financial Administration Act just to see how, in fact, that particular amendment translates itself through. I read here on page 2 that the Financial Administration Amendment Act, 1998, otherwise known as Bill 39, which we are discussing at this moment, says that there will be an amendment

in subsection (9)(i) by adding “or any subsidiary of Alberta Treasury Branches or any corporation controlled by Alberta

Treasury Branches directly or indirectly through one or more intermediary corporations" after "Branches".

But I couldn't find the word "branches" in section 81.1 of the Financial Administration Act within subsection (9)(i) of the Financial Administration Act. So I'm not sure if this is a mistake, an errata as it were, or if I'm just misreading something.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to turn to the Financial Administration Act, on page 55 of that act you would see a listing under section (9) of foundations, corporations, pension boards, utilities boards, et cetera, to whom this section does not apply. They are listed under subsection (9) as (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f), (g), (h). So I turn the page, looking on page 56 now, for section (i), but there is no (i). The bill itself amends section (9)(i) of section 81.1, but there is no section (i). I guess it's confusing to me and I must be misreading something somewhere, because it's not the type of mistake that you would normally find. That having been said, we might have to change section (d) of Bill 39 to read: in a new section (i) which would follow section (h) as it currently exists on page 55 of the Financial Administration Act. You would note there that the last section referred to is (h).

In any case, I would be very happy for some clarification, and if I'm wrong, I will take my lump and be grateful for the explanation that may be forthcoming. However, if on the other hand I am right in my understanding here, then perhaps the hon. sponsor of the bill, that being the hon. Provincial Treasurer, would in fact include an amendment to this amending act or whatever else is required. I would imagine it would have to be done through an amendment during committee to clarify or clean up that particular clerical error, if in fact that is what it is.

Once again, in a nutshell I would ask the hon. Provincial Treasurer to review section 2(d) of the act before us, Bill 39, to ensure that it reads correctly and is in compliance with what is intended and appears within the Financial Administration Act under section 81(9) as described.

The other quick comment that I'll make here during second is with respect to the consequential amendment that arises pertaining to the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act which includes the council within the section I've just been talking about, 81.1 of the Financial Administration Act. The net effect, of course, is that we're going to be extending the life of the Seniors Advisory Council. But as we extend the life of this very important advisory council, whose job it is to keep the minister and all of government, including the opposition, apprised of the necessary services that are provided to seniors in this province, to December 31, 2003, I want also to just make the point that we should also be extending the independence of that council and the ability to allow it to report very freely on what the concerns and needs are of the seniors in this province, the people who built this province, and also what it is that we as a government and an opposition are prepared to do to act on the recommendations that come forward through these councils and reports.

Mr. Speaker, we've seen on a few occasions in this House where reports get written up by so-called arm's-length or quasi-independent or semiautonomous councils, agencies, and foundations, and then somehow points within the original report become sanitized, sometimes screened. I find that to be very unfortunate, because when a group like that has been appointed through the normal process of an order in council, that means the individuals who appear on those committees have already passed some sort of a screening test, if you will. That means that those individuals have been placed on those councils and on those committees for the expertise they have, for the experience they have, for the vision they have, and for the integrity that I believe all of them

carry. Then once their report is written and passed on through into this House, it should simply be brought into this House for discussion and debate in an open fashion. It should not have to be sanitized.

I hear the bell has gone. I'll come back with my additional comments later, in the committee stage. That was the bell; wasn't it? Yes? Yes.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Truly unfortunate, hon. member, but it was the bell.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

3:10

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak today in second reading on Bill 39, the Financial Administration Amendment Act. There are a couple of points I'd like to make here. I commend the intent behind this bill, which is to review any government agency, Crown corporation, or advisory council under the auspices of the government to make sure they're still doing the job they were intended to do and to arrange for the shutting down of any agencies which no longer serve a good purpose. I think that's as it should be. I think it's important to have a strong process in place to be evaluating whether these groups are indeed still current and still helpful to the government.

There are a few things I find interesting. I notice that in the report of the Alberta Financial Review Commission, which had quite a bit to do with this bill – and I'll quote briefly from it if I may – they stated:

It is questionable whether the existing number of funds and agencies is necessary. There is a strong tendency to create a new special agency in response to each new need. Once established, they continue indefinitely by expanding beyond their original mandate, long after demand for their services has effectively ceased. The proliferation of these organizations results in increased administrative costs for the province and the possible application of funds in an inappropriate priority.

I think that's well put.

I pause here to mourn for a few minutes the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues, which indeed was a piece of legislation that had a sunset clause built into it. But part of what happened in shutting down that agency prior to its sunset clause coming into effect was the consultation with the community and with the stakeholder groups. I still see a place for the Advisory Council on Women's Issues. I think it gave very good advice to the government and probably can be used as an example of an agency that operated very efficiently with the amount of funds that were given to it.

That links into the next point that I wanted to bring up. The Liberals recommend including a comprehensive review mechanism, including a cost-benefit analysis and the promise of full legislative scrutiny and oversight when these committees, agencies, corporations, and councils are reviewed, but we don't have much information on that. The sunset review process was structured in such a way that it was all incorporated into the ministry business plans, which are developed behind closed doors and then screened through in camera meetings of the standing policy committees. I don't see a lot of opportunity there for the groups that either benefit through the establishment of these agencies or receive funds from them or work with them in a community relations capacity. I think Albertans need to know what studies were prepared and what consultations were held, if any, that resulted in the decisions to continue the operations for all of the agencies that are in Bill 39.

One of the things I noticed in doing some background research for talking about this bill was that there was the Liberal Motion for a Return 64 in 1998 which requested copies of documents or reports that were prepared by the Government Reorganization Secretariat. I don't think we've been successful in getting any of that information.

So, once again, if anyone out there in the public wanted to know the justification of decisions made regarding any of the groups that are included under Bill 39, including those that are being decommissioned or de-established or however one wants to put it, it's very difficult for any member of the public or a stakeholder group or a community group to find out why decisions were made or what evaluation process was used, what consultation was held. I urge the government – they have certainly demonstrated their interest in having public consultations on certain issues close to their heart; therefore, I know they are capable of holding public consultations – to make this more of an open and transparent process.

I am pleased to see that under Bill 39, specifically under part 3, there is the inclusion of all of the agencies that fall under my critic portfolio of Community Development. This was one of the concerns I had with the legislation that was put forward in June of 1997, that these groups were not included. I think if we look at the groups that are listed there – and my colleague from Edmonton-Mill Creek has gone through some of these – we realize that, really, they represent the quality of life for Albertans. They support the community and the groups that do give us anything you can think of that would be considered quality of life: recreation, arts and culture, literature, the Human Rights Commission, and, on a less happy note but certainly one that does contribute to our quality of life, groups like the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, which now works not only with people having problems with alcohol and drugs but also with gambling addictions and problems. I happen to meet regularly with clients and staff from this group, and I think they do a good job. There's always room for improvement, and I'm still eagerly looking forward to the outcome of the review process that was held on AADAC. I'm very glad to see that it was being continued. I assume that whatever came out of that review process has led to this being continued, and I'm very pleased to see it.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts is of course a foundation that's very near and dear to my heart. It does support all of the arts and cultural groups, amateur and professional, in the province that do receive provincial funding, and through this we are able to enjoy really the very rich tapestry of arts and culture that we have in Alberta. We're very lucky to be here and, I may say, particularly so in Edmonton, where we have so many arts and cultural events that we can partake in.

I know actually that the community has expressed a real interest – and I'm speaking specifically of the arts and cultural community – in what the process was of evaluating the AFA, what stakeholder groups were consulted. I don't think I have yet discovered one that was, but I might be mistaken, and I'd love to be reminded if my memory is not serving me well. They have asked me and I know they've asked their own MLAs and members of the front bench opposite for assistance in understanding the criteria in what was put together and the way it operates and whether there are any changes planned in the way that particular foundation does operate.

Alberta Historical Resources gives us many fine assets that we all enjoy, that we're very proud of as Albertans.

I would echo the comments of my colleague from Edmonton-

Mill Creek in our happiness at seeing the continuation of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, but once again I do urge the government to consider making this organization more independent. I think that is of benefit to everyone in Alberta and to the members of the Legislature, and I would certainly like to see it reporting directly to this Chamber, rather than through one minister, and to have again that evaluation process and any future plans made public.

3:20

The Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation is the other side of the coin of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. That's the foundation that gives funding to amateur sport and recreation groups in the province. Any group that receives provincial funds, that's where the money is coming through. I should underline here that the money that's coming through for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the Historical Resources Foundation, the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation, Government House, and the Wild Rose Foundation is all lottery dollars from the sale of pull tickets and scratch tickets and 6/49 and that sort of thing. So according to the way bookkeeping is done, none of the foundations that I've just mentioned in fact get taxpayer dollars. These are lottery-funded dollars for our quality of life, and I encourage you to be supportive of these groups.

The Government House Foundation again is another asset that all Albertans own and are very proud of. It's part of our history and our culture and our heritage in this province. I notice that they're on a campaign to revitalize it, to get back some of the furnishings and extra ornaments and things that they had in Government House in an attempt to refurbish it in a way to make it have more of its own things back. I commend them on that. I think it is something that's important to Albertans.

The Wild Rose Foundation is another foundation. Again my colleague has spoken about it briefly, so I won't go on. I do truly appreciate what is offered through the Wild Rose Foundation. It was one of the last lottery foundations to be brought on-line, and it was quite specific at the time it was put into place that it was to cover the gaps that existed if you were applying for funding to any of the other lottery foundations. It has evolved into or found its niche in volunteer support, in support of our volunteers and volunteer management programs in this province, as well as some assistance with other programs that are working with people directly in community frontline agencies.

They have a slightly different funding model than the other lottery-based foundations that I've spoken about in that once you are successful in receiving their maximum grant, that's over a three-year period and you cannot reapply until that three years has gone by. But I do know that it's responsible for assisting quite a few of the agencies in kick starting a fund-raising program. As the government has some would say forced and some would say encouraged most of the nonprofits in Alberta to move towards a higher fund-raising percentage and less government funding, the Wild Rose Foundation has been instrumental in helping them design and get their programs working, perhaps hiring fund development officers or fund-raisers or however you want to put it so that they can launch their own programs and be able to raise more of their own funds and be less dependent.

So I'm very pleased to see that these groups that I've spoken of are included in Bill 39. I was most distressed when they did not turn up in a similar bill last year.

I should just briefly mention that the Seniors Advisory Council

and the Alberta Order of Excellence are also included under the same section of agencies under community development that will be continued through this act.

I think we get very good value for our money out of these groups, and all of the groups that receive funding or are involved with these lottery-funded groups and the others I've mentioned really contribute to what we have in Alberta. If I was to ever say that there was an Alberta advantage, in my definition this is what the Alberta advantage is. So I'm pleased to see a recognition of that by the government in the continuance of these agencies.

Those were the comments I wanted to make in speaking to this bill in second reading, and I look forward to continued debate in Committee of the Whole. Thank you.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a few brief comments that I would like to make with respect to Bill 39, the Financial Administration Amendment Act, 1998. While previewing and going through the bill, I'm pleased to support its intent. However, I have a bit of a problem with the narrow scope or definition of the provincial agencies which leaves a multitude of ministerial advisory committees that were actually established within various government departments, such as the departments of Health and Environmental Protection, over the years. These are not provided for or are not subject to the same provisions as the sunseting. It's important that these advisory committees be included within the scope of section 81.1, sunset provisions of the Financial Administration Act, in order to be consistent with the recommendations of the Alberta Financial Review Commission.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Financial Review Commission pointed out quite a while ago that the proliferation of agencies and funds can actually create confusion and in fact reduce control. It should actually be noted in *Hansard* that comments from the Financial Review Commission were made quite a while ago, and I would like to quote them.

Before establishing any new agencies or funds, assess other methods of achieving government goals with input from various stakeholders. Agencies or funds should meet stringent justification requirements, be reviewed regularly, and provisions made for sunset clauses.

In order to be consistent with the recommendations of the Alberta Financial Review Commission, I feel that all government entitlements be reviewed regularly, and you have to include and ensure in that review that the sunset clause be part of that agreement.

With that comment, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure this side of the House, the Alberta Liberals, is definitely prepared to introduce amendments to section 81.8 of the Financial Administration Act to include advisory committees and revolving funds. They will not only reduce administration costs, which are escalating, and duplication and overlap of services, but they will increase the effectiveness of the accountability and reporting framework. That will obviously be done within the confinements of the province of Alberta. I think we on this side of the House are all more than willing to work with the government and ensure that amendments will be brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, for a long time I and the Alberta government have been supporters of the sunset provisions for government programs and agencies, boards, commissions, and advisory committees. When you review sunset provisions within the scope of the government legislation, you find that it should be put into effect in a proper manner. It should include a comprehensive review of mechanics which should be in place to include a cost-

benefit analysis and also to promise that full legislation scrutiny and oversight takes place.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately we have no way of knowing at this point how the sunset review process was structured given that much of the ministry business plans that were developed for 1998 to 2001 were actually conducted through in camera meetings of the standing policy committees. So lots of work has been done, as usual, behind the scenes, and we are not privy to that process. I think it's important to make a note of that.

We on this side of the House and all Albertans need to know what studies were prepared, what consultations were held with stakeholders. We need to know what the results were in making decisions to continue with the operations of specific agencies which were included and are included in Bill 39. In other words, what was the process established to justify the existence of agencies specified for continuation in Bill 39?

3:30

Also, I'd like to ask a question: what is the government's commitment to sunset review of agencies given the rejection by the government of Motion for a Return 64? That motion requested

copies of documents or reports prepared by or on behalf of the Government Reorganization Secretariat . . . regarding government streamlining and . . . consolidation . . . elimination or amalgamation of agencies, boards, and commissions; and the privatization, deregulation, or disposal of government assets and services.

That, Mr. Speaker, was found in *Hansard* on April 1, 1998.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Also, when you look at the provisions in Bill 39, another question that comes to mind is: why are the operations of revolving funds not included under the sunset provisions of section 81 of the Financial Administration Amendment Act? Revolving funds, Mr. Speaker, were established within departments to provide services or to sell materials to other branches within government or to the public. I think we need to know what funds were included, not included, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, if you note the Auditor General's comments in 1995-96, there is a quotation, and I'm going to read that as well.

The government should be able to fully cost its programs and services without the expense of operating revolving funds . . . A draft plan from the Deputy Provincial Treasurer indicates that the usefulness of the funds will be assessed by Ministries as consolidated planning and reporting evolves and alternatives become available. Unfortunately, based on the present time frame in the plan, this may not be done until March 31, 2006. This means that the government will continue to incur needless administrative costs for a long time.

I think that speaks for itself. The Auditor General has made these observations, and it is worthy of note.

I actually just have two other questions with respect to the bill. Why does Bill 39 narrow the definition of provincial agencies that are subject to sunseting to only those defined as those that administer money? We've had other speakers speak to Bill 39, and we find that any agency which does not directly deal with money issues, problems, concerns - when you look at the Wild Rose Foundation or other agencies that are not directly money related, they are not provided for under Bill 39. I think, Mr. Speaker, that should be addressed as well.

Mr. Speaker, just my other comment. It should be noted that boards, agencies, and advisory councils established within government departments incur significant salary and benefit costs

for taxpayers in Alberta, to the tune of \$5.3 million in 1996-97.

The intent of the bill leaves a lot of questions and thoughts that need to be and should be addressed by the Provincial Treasurer. I do believe that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek had some specifics with respect to parts of the bill referred to on page 2. We needed and asked for specific clarification with respect to one particular issue that has not been addressed. We're hoping that the Provincial Treasurer or his designate will offer some explanation.

Mr. Speaker, we would like it to be noted – and I think I mentioned this earlier – that we are more than willing on this side of the House to work with the government to strengthen the intent of Bill 39. I'm sure that we will be bringing forward amendments that would include ministerial advisory committees and revolving funds. I think that would be something that should be done in due course, as it would be consistent with the intent of the Alberta Financial Review Commission. Also, it would be consistent with the Provincial Treasurer's own comments which were made on June 11, 1997. They were in *Hansard* at that time.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I think the bill, as I've said before, does deserve some merit, and we will be bringing forward amendments to strengthen the bill. Not everything and all should be encompassed when it comes to agencies or funding in terms of dollars and cents, but there has to be a social conscience and some effort put in in that regard. With that I'll let the next speaker speak.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm anxious to add a couple of very brief comments with respect to Bill 39. My comments would be this. Generally the bill is positive. The concern that's been raised before by other members is that it's somewhat limiting, and in fact by narrowing the definition of provincial agencies and committees and using the single criterion to identify them in terms of those that administer money, the net falls short of capturing a host of advisory committees and so on that now will not be subject to the sunset provision.

I'd make the observation that when Albertans speak in terms of trying to ensure that we avoid excessive government, excessive regulation, duplication, redundancy, I've never heard people say that solely restricted to those committees or commissions or regulatory agencies that spend money. There are agencies that affect many other aspects of Alberta business, Albertan's lives, and it just makes sense that there should be that broader kind of provision. I've heard some reference that there will be an amendment that will come at the committee stage to broaden the scope of Bill 39, and that's one I'd look forward to and one that I'd be happy to support.

In fact, as has been mentioned, I think, by other speakers I've heard, there's reference back to the June 11, 1997, comments of the Provincial Treasurer, and the comments that were made at that time should indicate that the Provincial Treasurer would greet very positively the kinds of amendments that may come forward.

The amendments that I see would be required would be to section 81.1 of the Financial Administration Act. If in fact it's expanded to include advisory committees and revolving funds, then I think what happens is you achieve what presumably the purpose of the bill is: to achieve a higher and greater level of

accountability and a much stronger reporting mechanism, reporting framework. I think that's very positive. I remember that this is something that had been championed by Laurence Decore, a former leader of the Alberta Liberal caucus, who had been a strong advocate. We certainly find very much consistency in terms of the kind of leadership and advocacy that was provided by then leader of the Liberal opposition, by Mr. Decore, and I'm always grateful.

3:40

MR. SMITH: That was three leaders ago, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, we seem to be operating, members, on a three-year leadership cycle, but I think we're going to change that, Mr. Speaker. We're going to go for a longer term regime starting today.

Mr. Speaker, thanks very much for your gentle hint to return to the text of the bill. I just got subtly provoked by my friend the Minister of Labour there.

MR. SAPERS: He's your friend?

MR. DICKSON: Well, I'd hope that they'd always take compliments graciously, Mr. Speaker.

I just wanted to indicate that it's a good bill. If the Provincial Treasurer wants to economize on time – it's a lovely spring day out there, and I know members are anxious to get back to their constituencies and their golf clubs. But if the Provincial Treasurer is on the ball, he'd in fact be able to take these suggestions that we made constructively in the second reading debate and craft an amendment which would be able to address the concern, because that's the chief concern I've heard expressed by members in the Assembly on Bill 39.

There was one other observation I wanted to make. I'd hope that good ideas, from whatever source they may emanate, be adopted by government more quickly and be more speedily implemented in legislative form. I guess it's something always for us to strive towards, Mr. Speaker. Part of our job is to continually encourage the government to do that and do it more quickly. Otherwise, I think Bill 39 warrants support, and with the kind of amendments that have been discussed by some of my colleagues, we can make Bill 39 a darn good bill for Albertans and strike another modest blow for heightened financial accountability.

Those are the observations I wanted to share with you, Mr. Speaker, and members at second reading stage on Bill 39.

[Motion carried; Bill 39 read a second time]

Bill 41

Agriculture Statutes (Livestock Identification) Amendment Act, 1998

[Adjourned debate April 9: Mr. Sapers]

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

MR. SAPERS: Swell; we're back from New York City, Mr. Speaker.

I had some concerns about this bill that had to do with the degree of consultation. Also, there were some enduring questions about the identifier, where the device may be on the animals in question and the method that's going to be used and also how that will be determined, how it will be reviewed, the tendering process

for the device and the scanning and recording equipment that's going to be required, and also about the potential for conflict of interest in the enforcement and the potential for who and how the appointment will be made for whoever is the head of the new service. There's been some pretty wild speculation about that.

The one thing I would hope that this government would do would be very, very aboveboard, absolutely neutral, and would not make this a political issue of any nature. So we'd be looking for a widely advertised search process and perhaps even an all-party or select committee to review it and if not that, then at least a full list of all of the individuals and services that may be considered by the government before any decision is made. I think the cattlemen in this province would expect nothing but the most aboveboard process, and they deserve that.

Mr. Speaker, I don't really want to prolong the debate at this point on Bill 41, and I don't think I could ever match the eloquence with which Edmonton-Gold Bar enunciated the concerns of many individuals about the degree of trust which is necessary when we're looking at a whole new identification system. I won't belabour all of this, but I would hope that at some point in the process the minister responsible will answer some of the concerns about consultation, will answer some of the concerns and questions that have been raised about conflict of interest on the enforcement side in particular. Personally, I would like to know about the nature of the identifier and also, of course, how all of this equipment is going to be acquired or purchased by the service.

With those few comments I will take my seat.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got a couple of issues that I want to address with respect to Bill 41. In terms of looking at a couple of comments on the main focus and the main structure of the agency that's being created through this bill, we have to look at two of the functional issues that come up in terms of why we have livestock identification. Historically we've had branding that's dealt with the trade issues, making sure that an animal that is sold or bought has some identification associated with it. That was the real function of the branding aspect. In some industries, like in the dairy industry, rather than brands they use ear tags or pictures for their identification programs, and this is to be able to track and facilitate ownership trading.

The other issue that comes up – and I think this is the real motivation behind the idea of this national identification system that's being put in place, especially as it relates to the beef industry – is the quality management ID. This is being able to identify an animal and make sure that animal is trackable in terms of quality of product that comes out of it. This has to be looked at from the perspective of the degree of permanence that you can put to that kind of identification, the degree of tamperproofness, if that's such a word, that we can deal with in terms of identifying an animal and keeping that identification pure or valid. So what we've got to do is look at how these get put in place.

When we look through the bill and look at the conditions and that, we find that a lot of these parameters that are going to be put in place, especially for the quality management part of it, are delegated off to this livestock information service agency that's being created. It's also going to be controlled by the minister responsible for formulating the regulations. I have just some

comments in terms of some things I would like the minister to reflect on while he's building those regulations in the context of: how do we maintain both the trade aspect of animal identification and the quality management identification aspect? This is in terms of the issue of control and benefit. In terms of that, you know, when we're dealing with a trade identification, the benefit there is an issue of legality: is that your animal that's there? It also is, then, basically the owners and the buyers who benefit from that kind of a trade.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, the branding aspect that we've had in place since the settlement of western Canada is probably as good an easily applied system as the technology of the time and the technology of the day could have put in place. When we look at it in the context of the quality management ID, we end up trying to look at: is it feasible that branding as an ID mechanism can give us the same degree of control and the same degree of benefit that we would get from branding? Well, I'd like to suggest that as the minister looks at these regulations, one of the things that we have to really make sure we put in place for that quality management ID is the issue of permanence and nontamperability. You know, we have to be able to make sure that it can be tracked through. With brands the hide can be stripped from the animal; sometimes people are quite successful in actually manipulating a brand. We end up looking at ear tags: they can be snipped and replaced. These are the kinds of issues that come up.

So if we're going to really deal with the quality management issue, we've got to make sure that functionally we have some mechanism in place so that it's tamperproof. This means we've got to start dealing with some of our electronic mechanisms. This brings up an issue of: where do we deal with the cost? Where do we deal with the benefits that come from it? If we end up trying to do a kind of from birth to slaughter identification and tracking, most of the operational cost of identification falls back onto the owner of the animal at time of birth: the cow/calf operator for our beef operators or any of the other livestock operators or owners. It falls on them at the time of birth. We've heard a lot of them say: well, we can't have all of this cost fall to that one group. But if they really get it into a quality management process where the marketplace reflects the value of those animals as being superior because they can be tracked, that will bring back to the cow/calf operator, the birth owner, a benefit. Their animals should be put on the market at a higher value so that they can actually capture some of that additional cost that's associated with it.

So I think we've got to make sure that as we put this process in place, those birth owners – if I can call them that so that we can cover the cow/calf operators, the horse industry, all of the other industries that may come under this jurisdiction as well – can feel confident that their product will bring a higher price on the market so that they can capture some of these costs. This may mean that initially, as we try to establish this process, this identification, especially the quality management part of it, we may end up having to have some kind of pooling of those costs. This is where we have to deal with the issues of the brand inspection, the trade inspection, the trade verification part of it.

Historically we've applied a fee to every animal sold to have a brand inspector look at that. Those dollars then go into a pool managed by the government. The intent now is that that dollar will go into the pool managed by the livestock identification agency. Well, maybe what we've got to do is get the industry

behind this to the point where they'll allow some of that money in that pool initially to be used as part of this offset for the higher costs associated with the birth owner of an animal. It's really important that if we're going to make this quality management part of it work, we've got to get people to buy into it and not be afraid of it in terms of a cost.

The other thing is that as we deal with quality management ID, we've got to start making sure it gets to be broad enough so that there's a critical mass in the industry, that the marketplace can reflect the differential for the people who are willing to undertake that cost. Now, you know, this is going to take some time, and again we go back to this need to kind of give an incentive or, in essence, not have an extra cost associated with it.

The thing that I want to talk about in terms of some of the special concerns about the bill right now deals with the representation of a good cross section of the industry on this advisory board, the advisory panel. I know the minister has made some comments that he's going to make sure that a lot of the different aspects of the industry are there. We've heard concern from some of the people in the horse industry: are they going to be represented on this board? I think the minister is addressing that issue now in discussions with them. What we've got to be looking at is that as regulations or as application to a specific livestock sector are changed, as they're dealt with, will those members of that sector of the industry have input?

The other issue that we have to look at comes, I guess, with the idea of: who is responsible for this judiciary part of the agency, the actual part that brings out the legal aspects of the livestock identification system? Now, we're going to have here essentially some mechanism, as we talked about before, for tracking the animals on a trade basis. What happens if there's a dispute? How does that dispute get resolved? These are going to, I hope, be well delineated in the regulations that come out.

Also, I didn't see in the definition of regulations or the classifications of the kinds of regulations that the minister can put in place any aspect, any category that would identify what you might call an ombudsman function or an appeal process. This is important, I think, especially when we get into the quality management process. If a slaughter plant comes back and says, "Hey, look; this carcass ended up on the rack with contamination from a disease or from an antibiotic" and all of a sudden you've got a situation where a farmer says, "Well, that wasn't my animal," how do we make sure that that is kept there? How do they get a chance for appeal? What is that appeal process? Do they have to just take the word of the inspector?

When I start talking about the word of the inspector, this is another thing that that leads into: the universality of this program. We have to make sure that all trades and all slaughters, all deaths are recorded through the livestock information service. Otherwise, we end up with opportunity for tampering as the track of that animal is not maintained.

One of the other issues that has been discussed – and a couple of the people involved currently in the branding service have addressed me with their concerns – is that the livestock information system agency right now is being set up not subject to successor rights for the union employees that are involved in the current brand inspection process. I looked through the bill and I looked through the regulations which can be established by the minister. The concern that I've got is: is there some mechanism in there where this new agency through some wording of this legislation is going to be exempt from possible union certification at a future time, or is this something where the employees, if they

wanted to do some kind of certification, could organize across the province and in essence recertify themselves as a union? I think this is something that doesn't show there. To make these employees feel a little more comfortable, I really think we've got to have that kind of section put into the regulations or put into the definition of the agency.

4:00

The other thing that I want to make a comment on is that when we're dealing with the structure of the agency, there's a number of references through here in terms of limiting liability, limiting the delegated authority's responsibility, and I want to see here whether or not those limits are on a per unit, a per transaction, or a per inspection basis. What we've got is a situation where, you know, if you've got a group of animals coming through and there are only 10 in it as opposed to, say, a hundred or a thousand, you've got a lot of different per unit costs of that application and that potential liability. So what we've got to do here is look at it from the perspective of those two or three sections of the bill that deal with the limitation of liability. We've got to make sure that the producers at whatever stage in the life of that animal are not being subjected to any financial burden, that goes beyond the normal risk of transaction, associated with negligence on behalf of this new agency. So that's one of things that we need to be aware of and be concerned about as we look at some of the rules.

One of the other aspects in terms of the changes that are occurring in the bill is the section that deals with the "Recorder of Brands." Historically that's been done by part of Alberta Agriculture, and now the minister is able to appoint a recorder. That recorder then can subcontract or delegate to a subagency all of his powers, duties, and functions. Well, what I would like to have the minister do is elaborate a little bit on whether or not all of the regulations that are required of the ministerially appointed recorder would follow through and be part of any contract that that recorder signs with a subagency. You know, we've got to make sure that the standards and the process have integrity all the way through. So I would hope that we can deal with that when we get to committee and start dealing with possibly looking at section 4 of the Brand Act part of this piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I think right now in a general way those are the concerns I've got. I want to conclude by commending the minister for the foresight that's built into this bill. It provides the industry with a real incentive to become industry leaders on a North American, on a worldwide basis in terms of dealing with quality management in the livestock industry. This is getting to be really important as we see consumers willing to in essence pay more, put a premium price on a product that they can identify as having a quality management component to it. As our livestock industry builds this into a functional application, we'll see that our livestock producers do get to be rewarded for the efforts of this agency. I think it's the kind of thing that the industry should be supporting and that we as legislators should as well. It's the kind of bill that is going to give our industry, our livestock producers one foot up on everybody else in the world.

So with that, subject to the comments and the concerns I've raised, I'd like to recommend that everybody applaud this bill.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to talk today on Bill 41, the agriculture statutes. One of the main highlights, as I go through this and look at it, is the fact that this is to

privatize brand inspection services that are responsible for the registry, licensing enforcement, and identification of cattle and some other livestock. Changes are promoted by leaders of the cattle industry and will facilitate introduction of the national livestock identification scheme currently being developed.

There are concerns about the conflict of interest with the privatizing of enforcement agencies. I go through here, and I understand what brand inspectors are for: verifying ownership of animals at auctions, dealer sales, packing plants, and so on; for the retrieving and pickup of stray animals; and to deter theft. My background is farming, back a number of years ago. Even with renting out pastureland today, I do know that fences can go down overnight and cattle can get out. So there is a lot behind the fact that branding is very important. I still own the original branding irons of our family from the last hundred years, but I do think there must be better ways of doing it than what happened when I was younger and when we had a lot of cattle.

What is the matter with the current system that we look at? Many people seem to be satisfied with the existing system within government. What we look at during Angus Reid surveys and so on: 80 percent of people who responded were satisfied with inspection services. Under your study, the government study by Toma & Bouma, it states that all organizations with the exception of Alberta Cattle Feeders Association and dissenting groups within the Alberta Cattle Commission strongly support the current livestock inspection service and the role the service has played with the cattle industry. However, the same study found that the feedlot operators do not value this. Now, as we travel the province and we look at the amount of cattle within these livestock feedlots, I can see their problem behind that, due to the fact that the amount of money they are going to have to be paying out is tremendous.

The government makes a net profit from the system. The revenue exceeds the costs. Some think that the money should go back to the cattlemen, not to the general revenue. Two people from the brand inspections service that we talked to think that the industry wanted privatization of the system as they resent brand fees' surplus going into the general revenue. It could also be argued that the money should go into upgrading the information technology system, and if that were done, the government-run system would be in a position to meet further changes that are expected in the livestock identification program in the future.

As per the government study, which I was reading through here, a delegated authority has already been set up to take over the functions that are to be delegated through Bill 41. A new company, livestock identification services, which most people refer to and read from different sections as LIS, is being incorporated as an appointment to the interim general manager and will be up and running sometime this year. LIS will be run by a board of directors representing the major cattle producers and organizers in this province. As I'm perusing this, I do know and can see that there are quite a few different people involved. The Alberta Auction Mart Association is involved. The Alberta livestock dealer and order buyer association, the Alberta Cattle Feeders Association, the Alberta Cattle Commission, and Western Stock Growers Association are involved. It is good that it's being proposed that all of these services be transferred together into the new industry partnership groups called LIS and that the income and expenses associated with the running of the service will be transferred as well.

Now, we look at this, and I'm in support of this. We as the Liberal caucus do support it, but we do object to the fact that

there has been so little consultation with the cattlemen and those involved in brand enforcement. They have some serious concerns that must be voiced by ourselves, and maybe the government should question how they got to this point. But at the same time, I am backing this to the point that I do understand and believe in it. We must ask the minister to respond to the concerns by undertaking a proper consultation and education process before he proceeds, which I don't think will happen. He must also ensure a wider representation from the LIS board and show how the conflict of interest can be avoided if we have this completely private board.

4:10

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association, from our studies and talking to them, 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 all animals to be traced back for contact with disease, et cetera. At present the branding of cattle is not mandatory, and branding does not allow for animals to be traced from birth to slaughterhouse. The new livestock identification program will require a delivery program. Industry leaders think that this new change will be easier to implement as it goes private.

The process at present – and we look at this. At the standing policy committee on agriculture and rural development this past week the Alberta grazing association pointed out that the cow/calf producers had not been consulted on the point put forward through study of the Toma & Bouma report. Even when they had heard about the report, they could not obtain a copy from either the Cattle Commission or through the government until this past February. Plans for privatizing were mentioned in December 1997, but by the time the industry seemed to have decided what it wanted and indicated that they were rushing through it, the government seems to have jumped one particular step here. There again, consultation is very, very important.

Mr. Speaker, I take my leave, but as far as myself, I'm behind this actual bill. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 41 read a second time]

Bill 21
Alberta Health Care Insurance
Amendment Act, 1998

[Adjourned debate April 2: Mr. Hancock]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister. No?

The hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After seeing these bills zipping through this afternoon, I'm sure that the minister of intergovernmental affairs is going to be happy to see that when really contentious bills come along, the opposition is only too happy to spend the kind of time required to identify the shortcomings. Bill 21, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, is just such a bill, a bill that in fact is very problematic, is very contentious, and most important, it's one of those occasional pieces of legislation you'd want to characterize as dangerous.

As I told one of my colleagues this morning, I'm always a bit uncomfortable when I find I'm making common cause with both Lorne Gunter and David Frum, two small "c" conservative commentators, but you know, on Bill 21 they're absolutely right.

From editorial comment that we've seen in the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, and much additional information . . . [interjection] Well, David Frum is no liberal commentator, hon. member, and Lorne Gunter occupies a very different place in the political spectrum than I do. I would expect that many members would take and pay particular heed and listen most carefully to the kind of advice from those commentators.

The point is this, Mr. Speaker. Bill 21 is one of those pieces of legislation a little bit like – what was it? – Bill 13, the bogus propaganda bill attempting to be passed off as a piece of legislation. You look at that and wonder what happened to the draftspeople in putting this thing together. Bill 21 raises a host of questions. For a free market economy focused government such as we have, it's hugely ironic that the government would introduce Bill 21.

There are two particularly contentious elements. The first one is on page 2. This is the new section 2, and it's 5.11(1) and (2). Now, the first part of this is interesting and a curious kind of provision. What we have there is: "Subject to this section, every physician is deemed to have opted into the Plan." I challenge anybody to identify any other occupation or any other worker in the province where by statute you're deemed to have become part of some kind of an employment regime or you're deemed to have been part of a contract that you've never willingly entered into of your own volition. What happened to free enterprise? What happened to respect for the rights of individual workers? Whether their positions are pipe fitters, it doesn't matter very much. We have some basic principles that have to do with respecting the right of individuals in what hopefully is a free community to be able to choose where they're going to work and who they're going to work for.

So we've got the new section 5.11(1), "every physician is deemed to have opted into the Plan." Why wouldn't you provide or make it a requirement – and maybe the Minister of Health in debate is going to offer the clarification on this – that the physician would have to make some declaration, some election to opt into the program? The deeming section is amazingly high handed.

The further problematic provision is 5.11(2): "A physician may apply to the Minister to opt out of the Plan." There may have been some transformation in our province in the last while, while some of us were busy dealing with other issues in the House, but Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, Mr. Lenin, couldn't have written this any better himself. This is something that might have made sense in Russia in 1917 after the revolution, but I am absolutely astonished that in the Alberta Legislative Assembly in 1998 the Minister of Health and all those 62 members of the government complicit with him would bring in a piece of legislation that denies something as basic as an employee deciding that they no longer wish to work for a given employer. When we distill it, the proposition is as simple as that.

So I think that what we have is an amazing contradiction. We have the government that styles itself as the saviour of the market economy, the gladiators for free enterprise, yet they introduce a piece of legislation that is absolutely sweeping, breathtaking in terms of audacity, in terms of gall. It's an amazing provision, Mr. Speaker. In this House we know the Minister of Health as not being someone who's into self-aggrandizement. I mean, we know it's not the Minister of Health that necessarily wants the power, but why would the provincial government want to arrogate to itself such vast and sweeping powers? The explanation that was offered by the minister in introducing the bill at second reading just doesn't hold up at all.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill that I expect all members have received all kinds of interesting commentary on. I'd back up, before I reference the commentary, and say that in the autumn I was doing a bit of a health tour. I went to Red Deer, and in the large regional hospital in Red Deer, in the David Thompson region, I had a chance to meet Dr. Linda Whitham, the single physician in Alberta who has chosen to operate outside the Alberta health care insurance plan. You know what I found interesting? I had a lengthy conversation with Dr. Whitham. One of the things that struck me, paradoxically, is that one of the reasons she was anxious to opt out of the plan was because of the cumulative frustration that she and her partner had experienced practising in a smaller rural centre prior to relocating to Red Deer. What Dr. Whitham talked about with great passion and tremendous sincerity was the lack of support that she received from Alberta Health, the concern she had for disorganization and lack of planning in our health care system and in the region, commitments that she and her partner believed had been made by Alberta Health, perhaps through the agency of the local RHA.

So not only did we have just a single physician who has chosen to opt out, but part of the reason for her frustration in opting out are things that have less to do with the Alberta Health Care Insurance Act and plan than with many of the serious concerns we have with underresourcing, with lack of support for trained medical staff in this province. So I think there is something instructive in that.

I expect that most members have received correspondence from Dr. Bill Anderson, president of the Alberta Medical Association, where he expresses in very straightforward language their concern with the new proposed sections 5.11(1) and (2). It would seem to me that what would make sense to those of us who believe in a free market economy, to those of us who believe in liberal values, freedom of choice, whether you're an entrepreneur or a consumer, is that what we would want to do is simply say there should be a contract, like with every other employer and every other employee. There ought to be a contract negotiated between the employer, Alberta Health, and physicians, and you make a term of that contract the basis on which you choose as an employee to leave and that sets out the terms under which an employer may choose to terminate that relationship. I'm using employer employment; the same applies to an independent contractor.

This section 5.11 creates an enormously dangerous precedent. I can only hope that the good sense of members will prevail before we get to a vote at second reading on Bill 21, because the proposition set out here would constitute too radical a change to everything we understand about respect for the rights of parties to contract, to enter into agreements of their own volition knowingly and then to abide by the consequences. The AMA have detailed a number of concerns, and I can come back to that in a moment. I'd also received some very interesting information from the Medical Staff Association, Calgary General hospital, from numerous physicians in different parts of the province registering their very great concern with sections 5.11(1) and (2).

Now, I think there is value, Mr. Speaker, in being clear on what the rules are in terms of opting in and opting out. I think it's appropriate that there should be some additional clarity beyond what exists now in terms of what those rights should be. But my first point is that the decision to opt out ought to be provided for in the contract between the two parties, between Alberta Health and the Alberta Medical Association as the agent for Alberta

physicians. The provision now is completely unacceptable.

There are some other provisions that are interesting. I heard the minister's explanation. His concern is that in some regions if a number of specialists or in a rural site a single rural physician were to choose to leave the system, that would compromise the delivery of health care in that area. Well, clearly a concern. The recent history is that only one physician out of some 4,700 physicians has chosen to opt out, but I suppose if we want to jump at shadows, that may be a concern to address. The provisions here are, in my respectful view, unduly restrictive.

If you look at subsection (5), this is where the Minister may refuse an application if the Minister is of the opinion that there is a need for the type of insured services provided by the physician.

Well, what we have here is the Minister of Health, who does have a responsibility to make sure that insured medical services are available to every Albertan, regardless of where they live, and in every community, no matter how small or how remote from the bigger centres. That's the minister's obligation. What he is effectively doing in the proposed section 5.11(5) is passing that entire responsibility off onto the local physician. Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Minister, through the chair, through the Speaker, you simply can't do that, and there are members in this Assembly that will do what we can through the parliamentary rules to ensure that you're not able to undertake that sort of an affront to the system that we've believed has existed in the past.

If one looks at subsection (6), there are some provisions there. I can understand, if you're going to opt out, and I don't have a problem with requiring there to be publication of the notice. That seems not unreasonable. Posting a notice in a physician's office seems not to be an unreasonable proposition. Putting the responsibility on the physician to ensure that patients are advised of an opted-out status before the service is delivered: that's again a commonsense, reasonable proposition. I have no qualms, no problems with that whatsoever. But I do think subsections 5.11(1), (2), (3), (4), and (5) are problematic. I don't think you can hold individual Albertans or Alberta businesspeople or physicians effectively accountable for what the Alberta Health mandate and the Minister of Health's responsibility are. So I have that particular concern.

Now, that doesn't exhaust the concerns I've got. When I look at section 5 of the bill and the new proposed section 5.31, we have a really curious provision. The provision is subsection (2), which effectively allows

the charging or collecting of an amount paid for non-insured health or pharmaceutical goods or services where the charging or collecting of that amount is not otherwise prohibited under this Act or the Hospitals Act and a physician or dental surgeon reasonably determines that it is necessary to provide the non-insured health or pharmaceutical goods or services before the insured service is provided.

With respect, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that there's no way of rehabilitating subsection (2). I think the section is bad. I think it's flawed. I think it's dangerous, and I think it has to be excised before this bill goes any further.

4:30

The provision involving the new section 5 is a curious one. It seems that what the Minister of Health would do is attempt to more narrowly define those services that are going to be treated as an insured service. I think most Albertans would like to think that all necessary medical services would be available to them under the provisions of the Canada Health Act. The point is that if a physician deems that a service or a pharmaceutical good is

reasonably necessary to provide an insured service – if it becomes a prerequisite, in other words – then surely what we should be looking to do is ensuring that there is proper coverage of that, not trying to draw walls around it and start excluding things for which Alberta Health should be responsible.

It's hard to contemplate this, but if this should happen to get majority support at second reading, I'd want to signal to the Minister of Health right now that I'm going to introduce an amendment which is effectively going to eliminate subsection (2). I like to give the minister the courtesy of knowing in advance what he can anticipate if this bill should get through the second stage. I'm an optimist, Mr. Speaker. I know how important health care is to all of our constituents, and whether those are people in Pincher Creek, in Olds, or in St. Albert, this is the number one issue. Access to health care is the number one issue. I think that those people are going to be very concerned when they understand the import of section 5, the new 5.31(2).

Plenty of other comments, but I'm going to have to save them for the committee stage. I'm out of time, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 21. I guess I'd be interested in knowing the motive behind this bill, unless it has something to do with the ongoing negotiations. Maybe there's a little arm-twisting going on through legislation. It seems to be putting doctors certainly in a position where definitely if they opt out, they have to go begging to the minister to opt back in. I'm wondering if it isn't just a bit of a ploy to help negotiations going on. They'll say: we'll put it in this bill if you don't smarten up. But that would be assuming too much, I'm sure.

I just have to point out that concern, because when you glance at it, you think: hmm, I bet the doctors don't really like this bill. And sure enough, they don't. I read a letter from the president of the Alberta Medical Association, and there's great concern about this bill. I guess when you're doing legislation that definitely affects a certain group of people – of course, health care affects us all, but when it's specifically about a group of people, one would expect that certainly some sort of communication had gone on between the minister and that group so that there would be a level of comfort with the legislation. I certainly don't see that in this.

You know, it isn't a very friendly climate in Alberta for doctors, and regretfully I would say that's been the government's responsibility. I would say that through the serious underfunding of health care, we've got the different people who deliver the services in quite a bit of strife and stress and concern about how they're going to deliver health care. So I look at this bill, and from my own perspective I think: well, would something in this maybe help us get rural physicians out into those areas that are so in need of doctors? No. I don't see how that would help them, how that would help the minister even find doctors for those areas. So I don't know. Given the shortage of rural doctors and specialists in this province, I don't understand how this bill helps that. It doesn't.

I believe that with the lack of fee increases for doctors and the services they provide, it's increasingly difficult for them to maintain quality health services in Alberta, and as that becomes more and more the norm around this province, I don't see how

this bill addresses that. It doesn't. Now, my concern is that if more physicians start opting out, that's why regulations and bills like this are coming to the Legislature. Why are more physicians opting out? I would venture to say that it's because there are so many restrictions and limitations and unfriendly conditions throughout this province, and maybe it's their way of making a point. So they then have the ability, of course, to opt out. What's interesting is that if they choose to opt back in, they can't do it for an entire year, according to this legislation, my understanding of it, unless of course they have special permission from the minister. I guess I question that. Maybe in committee or at the end of this discussion the minister will explain that: a year being the amount of time that a doctor cannot opt back in.

Now, if you're a physician and it takes away your right to opt out of medicare, unless you're under a very dictatorial type of decision-maker, which of course, I hate to say, might be the minister, I can't fathom the democracy in that, and that concerns me. I'm worried that Alberta is in such disarray in health care. We've debated that often in here. We even had an afternoon when we spent the entire afternoon discussing the crisis that happened in Edmonton with all the red alerts.

4:40

So I would like to see that every piece of legislation with regards to health care is certainly doing something to address those things that are in crisis, and I don't see that in this legislation. As we get to more for-profit treatment facilities, will more doctors opt out to work in those? Does that mean a real luxury-type job, where you operate in almost hotel-like conditions and, as a result, as a two-tiered system continues, we see that the public health care gets undermined?

I see through this bill that if doctors continue to opt out, the minister keeps making rules and regulations for that. It should be a red flag for him to say: okay; what's wrong? We now have to legislate for those doctors who opt out. Well, why are they opting out? Maybe that's where we should be addressing our concerns and our energies. Why wouldn't doctors want to stay within a publicly funded health care system? It's because it's not a good environment for them. So that's where the energy should be: making this health care system the best, keeping quality doctors, surgeons, rural doctors in the system. So here we are dealing with a bill for opting out when we should certainly be looking at why they're opting and why we aren't making the system so that they opt to stay in.

I know that my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo will have amendments.

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, really?

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah. I know that I welcome the opportunity . . .

MR. DICKSON: To try and make that bill better.

MRS. SOETAERT: We always aim to help the government make their legislation better, and we do time and time again. I would bet you that the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, if we were to look it up, has the record for the most amendments presented, certainly presented, the most amendments accepted as well, which means that he's held in high esteem on the other side because he continually makes the minister look better by helping him out. In fact, even the Justice minister has benefited from many of his amendments as well. Absolutely.

So to Bill 21, Mr. Speaker, I'll summarize by saying that I'm

disappointed to see that the government is now dealing with rules and regulations for doctors who opt out when we should be looking at how we make this medicare system better so that doctors want to opt in, want to stay within the system. I also stress that there have been many, many concerns raised by the Alberta Medical Association. They feel it's very punitive and Orwellian. Pretty good word.

MS OLSEN: Spell that.

MRS. SOETAERT: Spell that.

I think that the Minister of Health has, with all due respect, a bit of work to do on this legislation so that the doctors have a higher level of comfort with it. Maybe the minister will have the right to let them opt in within a year, but heaven knows if that will be the same minister. Now, we might all trust that that minister would do that, but shuffles are inevitable, so one would . . .

MS OLSEN: Soon the Minister of Justice could become the Minister of Health. I don't know.

MRS. SOETAERT: We don't know. However, that's the joy of politics in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, with those words of concern . . .

DR. TAYLOR: You guys are familiar with shuffles. You just elected a Conservative as a leader.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's true. She's seen the light, and that's why she's a Liberal now.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're discussing Bill 21, Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 1998. I wonder if members on both sides of the House could remember that. Right now we only have one member, contrary to what *Hansard* may show, who is officially recognized to be speaking.

In summary, hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Debate Continued

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In summary, I've expressed some concerns about the bill. I'm surprised that the minister of science and technology across, you know, can say anything, since I sent him such a nice get-well card since he has regretfully had to, you know, use parts of the medical health system.

I do want to conclude by saying that I have grave concerns about the bill. I'm hoping it doesn't get to committee. However, if it does, we will always aim to make the bill a little better through our amendments and debate.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some concerns about this bill. I really wonder why we need to put forward a piece of legislation, at the government's whim, that dramatically changes the way doctors are doing business. It's clearly not something that the doctors have asked for, clearly not something

that they're supporting. So I'm wondering where this is coming from. Has the minister just decided? Are we going to have a piece of legislation where we can maybe toy with the doctors in terms of their contract negotiation? Maybe this will be a leverage that the minister can use in relation to the services provided by hospitals. I think it causes me a great deal of concern that here we are looking at this kind of legislation when we've got just horrendous problems within the system, and we don't seem to be able to deal with those problems.

Mr. Speaker, we've had a number of labour problems within the health care field and with health care professionals during our session right here from January on, and it seems that we can't resolve all of these things in an equitable manner. Then we bring in a piece of legislation that could bully one party in negotiations. So I'm wondering what kind of tactic will be used by the government in relation to this piece of legislation.

I understand that there's been a lot of debate, and that debate revolves around physicians being able to opt in or opt out without restriction and physicians choosing to opt in and opt out and not being allowed to opt back in until a certain time period has elapsed and then, of course, the option of not having physicians back at all once they opt out. Clearly, what's been pointed out by Mr. Anderson, the president of the AMA - he's expressing the displeasure with government underfunding and mismanagement in health care. That's the opting out issue for them. They don't see it as a preferred mode of practice. Most doctors don't want to opt out. We have one in this province. We have - what? - 4,670 physicians practising, and we have only one opting out. So I question why the minister feels it necessary to bring in one piece of legislation for one specific doctor, especially when the consultation shows that doctors are not in favour of this piece of legislation.

I do have some concern that we have under certain sections the ability for doctors to opt out and get paid for certain services, if they're opted out, if what they're doing is performing an emergency. That particular section remains unchanged in the bill. However, I guess as we proceed through debate, I would ask these questions to the minister: is the emergency defined by the doctors, or is it defined by the minister? Who determines what an emergency is? Has the minister decided now that he wants to take on that area of expertise as well, or are we going to leave that with the doctors and let them decide?

We have certain sections now ensuring that every physician is deemed to have opted in and is included, and now we have to go to a letter being written and the minister having the ultimate responsibility for whether or not a physician opts out. Well, that's all very fine and dandy, but if the minister decides that maybe a politically active doctor in a small rural town, who maybe doesn't support his position on things, wants to opt out, the minister will just say: "Well, no, you're not going to be able to opt out. I have the ultimate say and control, and we're not going to allow you to do that." He could use the excuse, you know, that his services are required because he's a rural doctor. So I'm not convinced that that responsibility lies with the Minister of Health. I think that's going one step too far in this legislation.

4:50

I'm also concerned about: why is it that dentists have a certain discrepancy? They only need to notify the minister 30 days in advance of an application to opt out. Now the minister is saying that doctors are different or surgeons are different or somebody is different here. Somebody gets 30 days; somebody gets 90 days. But we're not going to make it equitable, yet they are two

sets of professionals. Dental surgeons do one specific type of work in a hospital, and physicians do other kinds of work. So why 30 days for one and 90 days for the other? They're both doctors. They're both physicians. They're surgeons. They're doing different kinds of services, however, following within the same guidelines. So maybe that can be clarified.

The issue with "a physician [must] apply to the Minister to opt out" removes the right of physicians to opt out of medicare and places the decision in the hands of ministers. As I said before, I'm not sure that that aligns with the process outlined for dental surgeons. I would like to think that the minister is creating fair and equitable legislation, but that's not happening, because you have one group of professionals in one category and another group of professionals in another category.

I'm not sure what the real intent of this legislation is, other than maybe it's a negotiating tool for the government in terms of how they're going to proceed with the doctors. If they can't get the doctors onside with them, then heck, they're going to create a piece of legislation that's going to be a leverage for them. The kind of legislation that we as legislators in this Assembly should be looking at, I think: working with the doctors to create a better environment as opposed to creating a climate here that's for privatization and favours the for-profit sector in health care more than it does public health care.

With that, Mr. Minister, I would hope that you can enlighten us as to absolutely what your intent is with this legislation, because I don't think it has any really solid basis for being here. My job as a legislator is to be here to debate legislation that is meaningful. This is nothing but a ploy to take the upper hand in a situation that this government cannot seem to deal with. Health care is a big issue.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's bullying citizens.

[The Speaker in the chair]

MS OLSEN: Absolutely it's bullying.

Once this minister and this government manage to work together with health care professionals and other professionals in this province instead of trying to create divisions and bully legislation, then things will be much better for all of us here. I'm very much dissatisfied that I have to come and debate a piece of legislation with no really good intent other than to certainly take the upper hand in contract negotiations with doctors.

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

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to speak to Bill 21, the Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act. As I go through this, I'm just trying to see what the main objective is. It just seems to me that it clarifies or defines the process for physicians to opt out of and back into the Alberta health care insurance plan. Whereas the current Alberta Health Care Insurance Act clearly outlines the opting out and opting in for dental surgeons, it is silent on physicians. So I look at the amount of physicians we have in the province - and it's been stated a number of times: 4,670 physicians - and only one has actually opted out. So I'm wondering: why are we here, and why are we talking about this? There was a time when we were losing physicians out of the country. Maybe we should have been looking at the opting out at that particular time and asking Health

to put some money back into what we subsidize them for.

I look at this bill, and as I read through and listen to other members from our side speak about it, it is the physician's right to opt in and out. This government has created a very unfriendly environment for doctors in Alberta. Recent negotiations between the Alberta Medical Association and government have revealed an unprecedented level of discontent among Alberta doctors. Doctors assert that with the call for a fee increase incentive for doctors, a more aggressive strategy to recruit rural doctors, it is increasingly difficult to maintain quality of health in Alberta.

A constituent of mine came in the other day that went to see a doctor last Thursday with a WCB report that she had to hand in. At the same time she thought she'd get a prescription filled out so she could pick up her high blood pressure medicine on the way home. Well, this doctor would not do it. He told her to call back the next day and make an appointment for this week or next week. So I think that the kind of atmosphere that we're actually setting up in this province is very scary, very detrimental to people that really need us, need this government, us as elected officials, to fight for them.

In setting the stage for future private health services in Alberta, the government has made opting out a lucrative option for physicians. Now, this is really a difficult one for me to understand, why to opt out is to be lucrative. Well, it should be that they should feel like they're part of our system, being very appreciative and very proud to work here, but it seems like those that have stayed behind are being pressured into different things by an act. We bring bills forward. We should be bringing bills forward for the positive side, not for the negative side.

As more physicians choose to opt out, there need to be rules concerning how they may opt back in, a time restriction and limitation imposed. Although this legislation does not address this issue, it goes too far. It removes the right of the physician to opt out of medicare, making it subject to control by the government, a government that has proven to be unfriendly to doctors of this province and blatantly committed to creating a two-tiered, private, for-profit health system in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, a private, for-profit system here is something that we've watched coming. We have been trying to educate Albertans that this government is pushing this and that they should be speaking out. If such a few people in this province spoke out against private schools, maybe the same amount of people that are being affected by health should be speaking up, and the amount of phone calls that this government would get at that time would be tremendous. This legislation is also an acknowledgement that the public health system in Alberta is in such disarray that doctors must be legislated to remain in the public system, and the interests of Albertans need to be protected from price gouging by unscrupulous for-profit treatment facilities.

I look at this and wonder: why is this? We had such a great system. Yes, there was a time 10 years ago when everybody bought into the feeling that somebody had to take control of the health system. The escalation, the amount of pyramid-building within the system was so much that even the lowest people in the system knew what was happening in the hospitals, and they backed the government when there was talk of restructuring. But when you go into a restructuring mode – and I keep bringing this up, but it's an actual fact. When you start rebuilding and you're only rebuilding on the fact of destroying – and that's what it seems to have got to, because at a certain point we should have stopped and the government should have had a vision or a plan to rebuild back the other way.

5:00

We still seem to have a pyramid system within our health system. We hand-select people on regional health boards. We have more regions than we have constituencies in this province. We have suggestions that maybe we should be coming with less MLAs. Well, I'm for that, but I also would be for less of these regions in the health system.

Back to the bill itself. What is the problem Alberta Health is trying to solve with Bill 21? According to the government's own news release, of the approximately 4,670 physicians practising in Alberta, only one of them has really opted out. Is that what they're trying to solve? One person? That is really ludicrous. Like I mentioned before, maybe there should have been penalties for those that left our province. Alberta Health is attempting to pass Bill 21 off as support for medicare, but this rings very, very hollow in light of the government's fiscal undermining of Alberta's health care system over the past five years along with the resulting chaos and reduction in accessibility to quality care.

The doctors, the nurses, and the support staff in our hospitals in Edmonton have been overworked tremendously. The feelings within the hospitals are to a point where they wonder – well, I guess maybe after a few years the government will be successful in destroying unions. If that's what was the main cause of keeping up with this destruction over the last few years, I think in the last few months you've actually found out that you have demoralized them, so let's get back to looking at what our health care system is really about.

Mr. Speaker, I do hope that the minister will listen and answer some of the questions we've been putting forward and that for the sake of Alberta and for bragging across Canada, we might be getting back into the health care system that other ones choose to have or do have. I hope we're there.

With that, I take my leave, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a really interesting bill to me, and I am speaking specifically on second reading of Bill 21, Alberta Health Care Insurance Amendment Act, 1998. You know, every time we open up or look at health care insurance in Alberta, I have a couple of questions about it. Knowing that our predecessors and many of the people in the community, our grandparents, worked so hard to make sure we did have a publicly funded, accessible, universal health care system and how hard that was to get into place and how important it was to people . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: That's not how it was.

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes, it was. It was that group thing. It was a grassroots movement coming up for health care which was quality and accessible and publicly funded. There we go.

The health care system we have in Canada is one of the things that you always see brought forward by people when they're asked what's really important about Canada: "what are you really proud of?" Our health care system is one of them. So when you go to open up the health care insurance plan and tinker with it or adjust it in any way, I have to keep going back and saying: why? Why are you doing this? What are the good reasons? How important is this to people in Alberta? Is this going to change something? Is it going to improve it? What is this providing to people, or what service do they no longer need? None of those questions are being answered when I look at this bill.

What I find really interesting is that the government said that it was going to restructure health care when it started into this in 1993 or 1994. You know, I don't see that as having happened. I didn't see a good evaluation process. I certainly did not see a good public consultation process with stakeholders. I think the health roundtables may go down in history as one of the things we should be least proud of here. I've seen quite a bit of shuffling around of bureaucracy and administration in health care, but I don't see a new paradigm. I don't see a rethinking of this. I certainly wouldn't accept what's being proposed in Bill 21 as a new paradigm or a rethinking of the way we understand what we are trying to provide, the services we're trying to provide and the protection we're trying to offer to our citizens. I don't see it. I do see a new layer of bureaucracy in the middle with the RHAs in which they have the responsibility to do everything and not much authority to actually accomplish it, particularly where funding is involved. So it all devolves back to the minister anyway.

I have to state that out of all of the departments I think the Ministry of Health might get the prize for making the most people unhappy. We have the citizens of Alberta very unhappy, the senior citizens, certainly in Edmonton-Centre, very unhappy about the health care system, and long-term care problems in a lot of the Edmonton region making people very sad. So we have Albertans who are unhappy with this, we have the working professionals very unhappy – the nurses, the LPNs, the support staff – and now we have doctors very unhappy. Again, I don't think this bill is going to make them happy. Obviously it's not. You know, looking at some of the letters that have been written, they are not happy about this at all, and I don't really see a happy face on the Minister of Health either, so I have to assume that he's not happy about this either. So we haven't made anybody happy here except for perhaps the Minister of Education.

Why would we be having to deal with a situation of doctors opting out? Why? Why have we come to that point in time where doctors want to opt out of this system given that they put years and years of training into becoming professional, licensing, the amount of money they have to spend on tuition, especially since the tuition cap is so high.

MR. DUNFORD: You got that in.

MS BLAKEMAN: Snuck it in there.

Are we seeing the unhappiness with the doctors and their current job action – is this the canary in the mine? I don't know about that. I see it more as doctors looking for every way they can to express their frustration and disapproval of the current system, their desire to make it work in a way that is better for them and better for the public that they serve. What outlets do they have to try and show to the government that this is not working? Well, I don't know how well direct consultation has gone, but in the contract negotiations I'll hazard a guess: not well. So based on some of the correspondence I've seen, this bill doesn't appear to me to be satisfying the group that it is dealing with.

As I mentioned before, in Edmonton-Centre I have a lot of senior citizens, and there's a few really specific things in this bill that concern me around the seniors. I note that a physician who decides to opt out is supposed to post notices in the newspaper and all of that. I will still express a concern on behalf of some of the seniors in Edmonton-Centre that this is, again, not a happy thing for them. The seniors in Edmonton-Centre won't be happy about

this for a number of reasons. With some of the people, as they get older, changes are alarming to them, especially if it's a change in something that's very well established. They may not be reading the papers. They may not be aware that their own doctor has opted out. They go down to the doctor's office, and then, once they're in there, they're told, "Gee, we're opted out, by the way; so you can go home now if you don't want to pay cash."

5:10

It causes a lot of other questions to come up for them. I found it very interesting, the kinds of concerns that are raised to me by seniors around health care issues and about understanding whether they can be charged for things, what services should be available to them. This has been a very difficult time. I can think of few things that will be as alarming to someone in their later years as to find out that they would now have to pay cash or use Visa if they want to see a particular doctor. That's astounding. That's an astounding idea, that you'd be paying with a credit card to go and see a doctor in this province, in this country: home of medicare. That's astounding to me.

MR. DUNFORD: This isn't the home of medicare. Saskatchewan is the home of medicare, Laurie.

MS BLAKEMAN: Sure, but we adopted it really quickly because we were grassroots in there as well. It's important to me.

MRS. SOETAERT: What would it take to make you happy?

MS BLAKEMAN: To make me happy? What would I need to make me happy?

So, just to recap. I don't see that this is a move towards a new paradigm in the way that we offer health care programs in this province. There are obviously deep problems between those that are working in the medicare profession, the clients of medical services, and this government. This is not a happy picture, and I would dearly like to see us move in a positive way. I do not see Bill 21 as being a positive movement.

Why is this bill being brought forward? Is it demand from the public? No. Not that I've seen, and I have not seen any proof offered from my hon. colleagues on the other side of the Chamber that there was overwhelming demand on behalf of the public or even on behalf of the doctors to have an opted-out clause. My other colleagues have mentioned: one person out of 4,600 doctors. Does this address some terrible problem that we have long identified and been searching for a solution to? No, I don't think so. Certainly, I don't think that offering or giving very narrow confines to opting out and opting in as a physician is addressing any problem that's been identified as far as labour relations or provision of services in health care.

Is this trying to alleviate or stop any mischief? Well, I don't think so, not in my reading of it, and I haven't heard another explanation for that from the minister. Does it cause some mischief? Yes, I think it probably does. A number of my colleagues have spoken on the confusion that this can be causing. I think it is a mischievous bill. In my more cynical moments I think this bill might have been put forward as some sort of appeasement in negotiations with physicians. But they're not appeased in the least bit by this, so it doesn't seem to have moved the government forward in resolving any of this.

So those are just a few comments I wanted to make as far as Bill 21. I'll be really interested to hear what the Minister of Health has to say in defending this bill or explaining it a bit more.

It's been pretty thin up until now. You know, for a government that keeps saying they don't want extra legislation and putting more laws and rules and regulations on people, I'm really surprised at how much legislation comes forward from this government that is doing things that people did not ask for and don't particularly want.

So with those few words I will conclude my remarks in second reading of Bill 21, and I'm going to adjourn debate. I move to adjourn debate on Bill 21.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has moved that we now do adjourn debate. All those members in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we now adjourn until 8 p.m., at which time we reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]