

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 22, 1998 **1:30 p.m.**
Date: 98/04/22
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

O Lord, guide us in all our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I first say what a pleasure it is to see you in that chair.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of Assembly Mr. Walter Suter, consul general of Switzerland, located in the consulate in Vancouver. Mr. Suter is accompanied by Mr. Bruno Dobler, the honorary consul of Switzerland in Edmonton. I'd like to take this opportunity to officially welcome Mr. Suter to Alberta and to wish him an enjoyable and productive stay in our province. Alberta's trade interests in Switzerland include, although it's not trade, high technology areas of research and development and are highlighted by the fact that Geneva is the headquarters for the World Trade Organization, which deals worldwide with multilateral trade negotiations and in particular dealing with the new round on agricultural talks this fall. I'd ask the consul general and his party to please rise in the gallery and receive the warm recognition of the House.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got firstly a petition signed by 153 Albertans urging the government of Alberta "not to pass Bill 37, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 1998," and then I have a second petition to exactly the same effect signed by another 15 Albertans. Those are the petitions I have at this time.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give oral notice of the following motion.

Be it resolved that debate on third reading of Bill 27, Electrical Utilities Amendment Act, 1998, shall not be further adjourned.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to table in the Legislature the joint audit report of Alberta Registries by the Information and Privacy Commissioner and the Auditor General. The report was prepared at the request of Alberta Municipal Affairs. It contains 21 recommendations, 16 that we will immediately implement and five that we agree with in principle. Before we take action on the remaining five, we will be talking to stakeholders and to Albertans to fully assess the implications of these recommendations.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the College of Optometrists for the fiscal year ended December 31, 1997. Copies will be distributed to all members.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to table copies of letters I have sent to the Writers' Guild of Alberta and the Book Publishers Association of Alberta thanking them for their support of Canada Book Day, which will be celebrated tomorrow.

I am also tabling an information bulletin on Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is also being marked tomorrow, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Council on Professions and Occupations I am pleased to table four copies of the 1997 annual report of the College of Chiropractors of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today five copies of the performance bond agreement between Bovar Inc. and Her Majesty the Queen in right of the province of Alberta dated July 12, 1996. It shows that the \$30 million performance bond reduces to zero as of December 31, 1998.

With your permission, a second tabling. I'd also like to table today five copies of excerpts from the letter of intent dated January 15, 1996, between Bovar Inc. and the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation. It shows that the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, representing the government of Alberta, was eligible to receive 40 percent of the net income of the Swan Hills joint venture in 1996, 30 percent of net income in 1997, and is eligible to receive only 20 percent of net income in 1998.

I table these for clarification purposes arising out of comments that the Treasurer made yesterday, to seek clarification and perhaps correction.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of additional documents to table. Firstly, I have copies of 25 thoughtful letters from individuals and groups concerned about Bill 37. Next, I have a group of 60 postcards indicating a desire for a royal commission to examine the privatization of our health care system, 60 of those addressed to the hon. Premier and

another 60 of those same cards addressed to the Minister of Health.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to table five copies of a program overview for drug abuse resistance education. This is a comprehensive prevention education program designed to equip elementary school children with skills to recognize and resist social pressures to experiment with tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table copies of amendments to a bill that will be sometime coming before the House. These amendments will not be put because of this government's arrogant use of the closure motion.

Sir, I have another tabling here. It's a copy of a letter from the mayor of the city of Calgary to all members. It outlines a number of their considerations and concerns. One of the things that has been made aware to me is that he would like to have had at least one member of Calgary deliver a speech on his behalf, and it does not appear to be happening.

Mr. Speaker, the last tabling is copies of a letter to all members of the Assembly, and I hope that they will read it later today. It's from the CEO and president of Canadian Utilities Limited, one of the beneficial owners of Alberta Power. It outlines and quite clearly points out that the Minister of Energy is in error. [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: For people in the gallery, the reason that there's a lot of chatter is that we're getting an editorial comment as well as a tabling.

Could we be a little bit more brief and succinct as to what the topic is?

The hon. Acting Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. The first is a series of letters to members of the government from citizens throughout Alberta who are very concerned about Bill 37 and urge the government to pull this bill.

Second, Mr. Speaker, is a constituency report from my constituency of Edmonton-Glenora which details the 37 messages that I have received so far on Bill 37. Thirty-six of those messages oppose the bill; one supported the bill.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition. [interjections] Hon. minister, I've not yet called you. I did call the hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm filing five copies each of three amendments that I propose to offer to the Assembly should the unfortunate occurrence of the HRG legalization act actually come into committee at some point. That is Bill 37.

1:40

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise and table four copies of the first annual report for my constituency, Edmonton-Riverview. The report contains a summary of inquiries, appeals, research, outreach, our communication priorities, and the budget and expenditures for my constituency in 1997-98.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings to make this afternoon. The first is a letter from the mayor of Calgary, Mayor Al Duerr, addressed to me. It is dated April 16. In this letter the mayor expresses serious concerns about Bill 27.

The second tabling is a letter that was hand-delivered to me this morning by two of my constituents who expressed very deep concerns about Bill 37.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to table, just in from final edit and immediately ready for tabling, four copies of the Safety Codes Council annual report.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would like to table a memorandum from the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, requesting that Bill 213, School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998, be brought to Committee of the Whole on Tuesday, April 28, 1998, as soon as the House business will allow.

head:

Introduction of Guests

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, in the spirit of National Volunteer Week I would like to introduce to you and through you 11 employees of the public information branch, visitor services, who are important volunteers, assisting with school groups, tours, and the training of new recruits. This group is accompanied by Janet Baker of the Legislative Assembly Office. They are seated in the Speaker's gallery. Please welcome the following senior volunteers with more than three years, Jean Yates, Doreen O'Callaghan, Clive Lomax; junior high work experience volunteers, Jacqueline Davis and Jeff Reiter; and new recruits: Rita Alfrey, Shauna Chartier, Michael-Paul Duxbury, Jeanne Siu, Pat Foster, and Myrna Grimm. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm, traditional welcome of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We'll have to work on shortening that.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Ellerslie I would like with your permission to introduce through you and to all members of the Assembly a group of visitors in the gallery today. We have with us 209 visitors from Holy Trinity

Catholic school. These are two classes. I believe 60 or so of them are in the public gallery, and the remainder are in the members' gallery. They are accompanied by teachers and parents, including Mr. Philip Pegg, Ms Cindy Winter, Miss Shauna Babysh, Mr. Ed Kiryluk, Mr. Kelly Kaup, and Mrs. Gerry McKercher. I would ask this large and impressive group to please rise and be received by this Chamber.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Bryan Hearn. Mr. Hearn is a good friend, a constituent of Lac La Biche-St. Paul constituency, and also a 20-year member of the Alberta Conservation Tillage Society. Mr. Hearn is seated in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask him to rise to be recognized.

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

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly four guests: Kendall Gawryluk and Jon Jarvis, both here from Edmonton, and two, I guess, students attending the University of Alberta, I think outstanding students, Rachelle and Jenny Melchin, who happen to also be my daughters. If they'd stand and receive the warm welcome.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Mr. Bohdan Suchowersky, who is doing a one-month placement with the Alberta Liberal caucus. Specifically, he's assisting our resource centre co-ordinator, Norma Spicer, in updating our library. He comes to us from the excellent program at Grant MacEwan, the library technical program, which is one of many excellent programs across the province. I've known Bohdan and his family for many, many years, and I'm very happy to see him following in the academic footsteps of his parents. Bohdan, please rise and receive the warm welcome. Veetayemo.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Leader of the Opposition.

Private Health Services

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Health care in Alberta should be all about access and quality and affordability, not about lineups, salesmanship, and profit. The heart of Canada's health care system is public administration. Now, that means public dollars are spent on public services for a public benefit. Any move to private administration will drive up costs, it will decrease access, and it will reduce quality control to promises made in a sales brochure. My questions are for the Premier this afternoon. As the government contemplates licensing for-profit hospitals, has a price tag been put on the cost of monitoring, negotiating, overseeing, and ultimately enforcing contracts between health care corporations and the regional health authorities?

MR. KLEIN: Well, that's an interesting question, and it's one that perhaps could be more appropriately answered by the hon. Minister of Health. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say, prior to the hon. minister supplementing, that we are not in any way, shape, or form promoting for-profit health care. We are trying to protect public health by making sure that those who enter into any aspect of health care comply completely with the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act.

Mr. Speaker, there is no denying in this country that there is, as I mentioned yesterday, a profit motive attached to health. It was in existence before health care came along, it's been in existence since, and it's a growing industry. Here's an example. Canada's federal Health minister, a Liberal in Ottawa, Mr. Rock, has in fact estimated that the private sector makes up about 30 percent of Canada's health system, the private sector.

I would like to, Mr. Speaker – and you can tell me to sit down when you think my time is running out, but I think that some facts need to get out. Some examples of private-sector involvement – and they've had no complaints about this involvement whatsoever – in delivering quality health services to Albertans include 4,200 physicians in Alberta, who are in fact each private-sector health providers and who build the public health system under the terms of a contract for services provided to the public system. They're there to make money; they're not there to lose money. They are there to make money so they can provide themselves and their families a living and in many cases a very good living. There are also over 500 chiropractors, 200 optometrists, 1,344 dentists, 179 denturists, some 30 podiatrists, who are private operators in Alberta with their own private businesses yet do work for and in support of the public health system. Again, they're in the business to make money. To make a profit.

We have over 750 pharmacies in the province, all private-sector health providers yet an integral and essential part of our public health system. Those people who go into pharmacies, Mr. Speaker, are there to make money. Now, the list goes on and on.

1:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Maybe the Premier will stop reading his briefing notes for a minute and begin listening to Albertans, because they know the difference.

Mr. Premier, why is this . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I just wanted to make sure that you were going to ask a question.

MR. SAPERS: I'm working up to it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, why is this government promoting a health care policy that replaces accountability through the Auditor General and the Legislature with accountability instead through the boardroom and the stock market?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I would take it that the hon. member is alluding to Bill 37, which is currently before the Legislative Assembly. There's ample time to debate that bill, but if he wants the answer to that specific question, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health supplement.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think one thing that should be said is that the opposition seems to be forgetting what I think is the important feature of our public health care system, and that is that it is designed to provide quality care and financial support

for the patients of this country and this province. Instead, they seem to be wound up over some anticlinic or antipharmacy or anti private enterprise philosophy. The whole point here is that Bill 37, which will be debated this evening, is designed to make sure that any development in the health care system, particularly with respect to such things as private clinics, does not jeopardize the public health care system.

MR. SAPERS: Given that the provincial government must pay the facility fee for all private clinics in order to comply with the Canada Health Act, will the Premier disclose how much money will be taken away from public hospitals in order to line the pockets of those who would establish private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, eventually we pay the whole bill to the benefit of private-sector operators, who are in the business to make a profit. I will go on. We have national and international drug companies, all profit motivated but doing the research and producing the healing and often lifesaving drug products purchased by our public health system in support of Alberta patients. All profit motivated. We have our private-sector air and ground ambulance operators providing emergency and critical services to Albertans and to the health system. [interjections] We have a long history of private clinics . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, as you well know, *Beauchesne* has within it reference to the fact that the question must not seek its own answer. Implied as well in that is that when the answer is being given, you don't keep prompting the answer. So I wonder if you and other members could record that.

Hon. Premier.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, to answer the specific question, we do have a long history of private clinics, such as our ophthalmology clinics providing essential cataract and other practices to Albertans, and we did abide by the federal ruling relative to facility fees to bring us in compliance with the Canada Health Act: again, private-sector facilities providing services to Albertans without charge, paid through contracts with regional health authorities so that services are delivered in the most efficient and effective way possible. But I would remind the hon. member over here that the people who operate those clinics under contract with the regional health authorities are in the business to make money. Sure, they're in the business to provide essential health services to Albertans, but they make a profit. They're corporations.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's just see who's got the short memory. I have in hand a news release from Alberta Health. It's dated January 28, 1998, and is headed "Restrictions on Private Health Facilities." In that news release is the following statement.

Under the proposed legislation, the Minister of Health would establish an advisory committee to make recommendations with respect to approval for any such private facility.

My question this afternoon is to the hon. Premier. Just what happened to that proposed advisory committee? We're still waiting.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. minister supplement, but much of this is contingent on Bill 37, the bill that is before the Legislature now, the bill to which all hon. members will be able to speak at the appropriate time as it works its way through the process.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health.

MR. JONSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. When the legislation, Bill 37, is approved, then certainly the content of that particular press release will be acted upon.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, the amnesia is rampant.

Given that the minister's own press release states, "The Health Minister will be consulting with health system stakeholders in the coming weeks," just precisely what health system stakeholders has the minister consulted with? It hasn't been the AMA; it obviously hasn't been the united nurses association, seniors' advocacy groups. Who has he been talking to?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the legislation, there was a great deal of discussion and consideration that went on with people who are knowledgeable in terms of the interpretation of the Canada Health Act. Legal advice was sought rather extensively. The other thing is that I remember the opposition complaining about the fact that we did not get the legislation in quickly enough, and quite frankly the reason for that was that we took some time to develop it in detail.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my final question, back to the hon. Premier: why would his government leave a decision as important as approval of a private hospital in the hands and in the sole discretion of one Minister of Health? Why would he do that?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, whether this hon. member likes it or not, the hon. Minister of Health was appointed to Executive Council with the sole responsibility to oversee all health services in the province of Alberta. That is his job. That is his responsibility.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Third main opposition question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Workplace Fatalities

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Next week the world will pay tribute to the millions of workers who have been killed or injured because of unsafe or unhealthy workplaces. In 1997 120 Albertans lost their lives as a result of unsafe or unhealthy work sites. This is a 62 percent increase since 1994, when the Department of Labour was restructured. My first question this afternoon is to the Minister of Labour. Between 1994 and 1998 occupational health and safety cut its budget by 30 percent. Is the lack of field inspections the reason for such a dramatic increase in the number of fatalities in the workplaces of this province?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, even one death in the workplace is

recognized as one death too many. I think there is a great deal of compassion that goes out with every fatality that's reported to me. I have an early warning system in the department so that I am to be one of the first to know when a fatality occurs in the workplace. I've lived with it in business. I've been fortunate enough to have businesses in the oil industry that never did register a fatality, but I did have friends and I did have colleagues in the workplace that did have these fatalities. So each fatality is recognized as something very important and something not subject to political colouring but subject to scrutiny, subject to corrective actions, and subject to finding ways to ameliorate and make the situation better for the next person.

2:00

This information that the member is, I think, using as a basis for his question, Mr. Speaker, is something that I received today from the WCB, which I'm more than prepared to table. It says on the front 119 fatalities; it says in the chart 120. I know that there were less fatalities reported in 1980 than there was money spent. We do know that the Department of Labour's responsibility in occupational health and safety is to work on prevention, but we can't have an inspector in every trench, an inspector behind every tree. What we have is partnerships, and we have both employers and employees working together.

MR. MITCHELL: You don't care, Murray.

MR. SMITH: That's wrong. That's wrong, and if you start to think like that, then you've got a problem. You've got a problem, and you know it.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: When we seek to accuse one another of things, it inflames people and angers and upsets people. Perhaps we can get back to the questions and the answers without all of the interjections, hon. members.

Mr. Minister, are you okay?

MR. SMITH: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to ask for an apology from such an uninformed, ignorant person.

Workplace Fatalities (continued)

MR. SMITH: I do want to say, Mr. Speaker, that every key business indicator in this department is driven towards reducing the number of fatalities in the workplace today, but we don't do it as a government. People do it as employees; people do it as employers.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Labour. Are you going to measure this as anything other than a failure in your department's key performance measures?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask this arm's-length, board-governed organization for a perspective on their statistics. I mean, I think that perhaps the hon. member would have wanted to phone that organization himself and say: "How does this compare in terms of a rating? How does this compare in a perspective?" I would like to see the hon. member of the opposition anchor his question in some perspective fact.

MR. MacDONALD: My third question this afternoon is also, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Labour. This is the comparison from the WCB, and if you want a comparison, since 1994 your department has cut 244 jobs, jobs of inspectors that are needed to protect the workplace and livelihood of the workers of this province. Are you going to restore those jobs?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: As the Speaker was able to determine, it sounded like whether or not you wanted a comparison of – was that the question you heard?

MR. SMITH: I think, Mr. Speaker, what I got from the member opposite was some fact that spending more money in the province of Alberta in its government budget would in fact prevent the fatalities. In fact, if the member reviews the situation in Alberta from a long-term point, from 1980 on, he'll see that spending more money on a problem is not a way to solve a problem. What else he'll see is that the gross domestic product of this province is now \$91 billion; in 1992 it was \$75 billion. That's a \$16 billion increase by the private sector. He will see that there are 200,000 more jobs in Alberta than there were in 1992-93. He will take a look and he will realize the economy of this province is in a much different perspective than what it was in 1992-93.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, even when the Alberta Medical Association asks the government to slow down on its policy of promoting private, for-profit hospitals, the government says no. It won't back down. I think it's time we called a spade a spade and exposed why the government won't back down. It's because they want to promote private, for-profit hospitals in Alberta to save the financial bacon of the directors and investors of the Health Resource Group out of Calgary. Plain and simple. My question to the Premier is this: why does he believe that the private interests of a group of Calgary investors should be given priority over concerns expressed by doctors, nurses, a number of other health care professionals, thousands of ordinary Albertans, all of whom are calling on this government to back down on private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that accusation is absolutely absurd. Absolutely absurd. We are not through this bill trying in any way, shape, or form to promote private health care. What we are trying to do – and I'll say it for at least the 10th time – is to protect the health care system to make sure that those who are involved in the system abide by the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. It's as simple as that, Mr. Principle. To suggest that this government is supporting in any way, shape, or form the proponents of any endeavour is absolute nonsense. Just absolute nonsense and complete rubbish. That's about all I can say. It's just rubbish.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Premier, call me from Missouri then. How can the minister . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, could we allow the courtesy to let the hon. member ask the question? The Premier and the Minister of Health are quite capable of answering the questions.

MS BARRETT: Except for when they call you Mr. Principle, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question.

MS BARRETT: Yes. The question to the Premier is: how can he say it's nonsense and rubbish that that's what this policy is about when the only private health care company that's been lobbying and twisting arms for the last year to get this kind of legislation so they can do complex surgeries overnight is HRG out of Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the hon. leader of the ND opposition has been lobbied. Maybe she has. I don't know.

MS BARRETT: Oh, yes. I was.

MR. KLEIN: But I haven't been lobbied, Mr. Speaker. I haven't been lobbied relative to this particular project, and I don't know about the Minister of Health. But I have to reiterate that in no way, shape, or form are we promoting any business. R – what is it? – GH . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: HRG.

MR. KLEIN: HRG. Right. The Health Resource Group, Mr. Speaker. It's just absolute nonsense to accuse anyone in this government of promoting that group or any other group. Again, I have to say that the bill is intended to protect our public health care system and to make sure that those who participate abide by the principles of the Canada Health Act.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I really think that although there will be certainly further debate this evening on this bill, given the very unfounded allegations of the hon. Leader of the NDP, I would just wish that she would read the bill.

Now, with respect to the matter of the private clinics I'd just like to read a couple of things. First of all, we adopted a private clinic policy with respect to the control of private clinics in 1996. What this bill does is strengthen the ability of the government to act, from simply having a policy to putting that policy into legislation, Mr. Speaker. Another thing that did not exist – and I'm sure that without legislation we would probably not have been able to enforce it in any way. If this private clinic policy is not adhered to by a particular entity, then there are fines; there are penalties for not complying with that particular policy and in any way jeopardizing the public health care system.

I could go on, and I will elaborate further this evening, but I wish she would read the bill.

2:10

MS BARRETT: I read it and prereleased it on you, Mr. Minister.

To answer the Premier's question: yes, I was lobbied, and HRG gave it to me in black and white. They want private, for-profit hospitals. This is their business plan. I tabled it last year. [interjections] He asked me a question, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: That's right. I don't think you really want to start that precedent, though. Hon. leader of the ND opposition, if you'd just ask your question, then perhaps we could get on with question period.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier say that HRG doesn't want to get licensed under this govern-

ment's private, for-profit policy when its own business plan says in black and white – I tabled it last year – that it wants to do business with the regional health authorities on medically insured services?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not involved in the business of the Health Resource Group, nor have I had any detailed discussions. I don't recall any discussions with the group. I might have received a letter or so explaining what they want to do, but the reply has always been: whatever you do must be in compliance with the Canada Health Act. It's as simple as that.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment that I have not been lobbied by this HRG group, but perhaps they think they have a better chance with the leader of the third party.

I'd just like to go back to the bill for a moment. As has been outlined very thoroughly in this Assembly previously, we have a degree of private involvement in the health care system right now. We do have people operating under contracts, but the legislation makes sure that any contract that might be contemplated for anything has to be approved by the minister, not just the RHA.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would observe, as others have, that this bill is on the Order Paper for this day, so we would hope that we could deal with it later.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Impaired Driving

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On June 23, 1996, Craig Powell, Stephanie Smith, and Amber and Brandy Keuben were returning to Calgary from a weekend in Banff. On their way to Cochrane for ice cream cones, they were hit by a drunk driver, and all four were killed. For the families the last 22 months have been indescribable. Outrage and disgust followed the sentencing, which was a five-year jail term for killing four young people. The driver will be eligible for parole in 20 months. To this family murder is murder whether it's by a gun or a car. My first question is to the Minister of Justice. Why was such an inadequate sentence given for this crime?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the sentence was handed down April 8, so the matter remains within the appeal period. Therefore, I'm limited in what I can say. We are, nevertheless, carefully reviewing the decision. However, I do agree with the hon. member that the damage caused by impaired driving is devastating, and as a government we are doing all we can. In fact, our department is working closely with the Minister of Transportation and Utilities in that regard. Since his department is primarily responsible for the legislation in question, I would assume he may wish to supplement my answer.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes. Certainly this is a tragedy at its worst really. As Albertans we have been leaders in dealing with the issue of tough measures as far as drinking and driving are concerned. We have one-, three-, and five-year suspensions that are in place now as far as impaired is concerned, and we are considering extending it to a longer period of 10 years when we bring forward the new highway traffic safety act. Alberta is the first jurisdiction in Canada to have implemented the interlock system. Indeed, the vehicle seizure program was introduced in

Alberta. So we have been very, very concerned as well about the issue of safety on our highways, and certainly the impaired and the drinking and driving are of a major concern to us in the province of Alberta.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental question is to the minister of transportation. In regards to what you just said, I have to ask: why chronic offenders and not first-time offenders, then, Mr. Minister?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: We have a staged process where indeed for the first offence, as I mentioned, there's a one-year licence suspension. The second is a three-year, and the third is a five-year, and in order to get your licence back, you have to appear before the Driver Control Board and prove that you indeed have changed your ways. So the process is not automatic. It's one where really you have to show that you have changed your ways and you no longer are drinking, which of course allows for the dangers of drinking and driving.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Final supplemental, Calgary-Fish Creek.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. As a mother of MADD I'd like to know: what is the status of an administrative licence suspension in Alberta?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Alberta's considering that as part of the new highway traffic safety act. What we are looking at is the legislation that was implemented in Manitoba in 1989. Indeed that seems to be the one that has been the most successful and the one that seems to be able to move through the courts without being contested. It has been very successful in Manitoba, and consequently that will be the one we are looking at paralleling when we bring forward the new highway traffic safety act.

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

Protection against Family Violence Act

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been receiving numerous phone calls from stakeholders and citizens asking when the Protection against Family Violence Act will finally be passed by this Assembly. Yesterday the Minister of Justice informally committed to ensuring that Bill 19 will be on the Order Paper by Monday, the 27th, at the latest. To the Minister of Justice: will the minister now formally tell all Albertans what day Bill 19 will be brought forward for third reading in this Assembly?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, Bill 19 has been on the Order Paper for actually quite some time. Through the discussions I had with the hon. member yesterday, plus I had similar discussions with the now Acting Leader of the Opposition, the new House leader, and I think the Member for Edmonton-Norwood. I did make the commitment that the legislation would be passed prior to the adjournment of this session, and I'm quite happy to say that publicly.

What I will also indicate at this time is that again I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie, who has been carrying this legislation through the House. She's done an excellent job. It's important legislation. We hope it will resolve some of the problems that are associated with family violence in this province.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much for that commitment.

To the same minister: given that the bill does not take effect until it's proclaimed, can the minister tell Albertans how many months it will be before the bill can be used to protect victims of domestic violence?

MR. HAVELOCK: From what I understand, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Currie will be bringing an implementation strategy forward for consideration by the standing policy committee by the end of May. Depending on how that goes, hopefully we can have proclamation shortly thereafter.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: will the minister commit to ensuring that a member of the Official Opposition has a place at the table with the stakeholders so that we can have input into the implementation of this important legislation, just as you did with Bill 1?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're always happy to hear from the Official Opposition. However, I understand again through the Member for Calgary-Currie that you have made a submission to government, and that submission is in the process of being considered. If you would like to make some suggestions regarding implementation, then certainly those will also be duly considered.

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

Education Property Taxes

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of my constituents are concerned about the way the government redistributes education property taxes. Every year education taxes are pooled and then distributed to school boards on an equal, per student basis. However, this system appears to be taking property taxes from Calgary to support students in other parts of the province. This is according to the Calgary board and recent reports in the media. To the Minister of Education: how can a funding system that takes from one school board to give to another be fair?

2:20

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, a funding system that is designed to ensure that all students in the province of Alberta have equitable access to funding is the only fair system, and that is the type of funding system we have in this province.

Mr. Speaker, school board funding is based on student enrollment and on program needs and is not based on the wealth of the local tax base. This helps ensure that students get the same quality of education regardless of where they live in the province and that some students are not left out just because of where they live. This is the same principle that is employed by school boards when funding have and have-not schools in their respective jurisdictions. Schools in less affluent neighbourhoods will qualify for the same funding as other schools even though the houses nearby such a less affluent neighbourhood have less value. In the same way, schools boards in municipalities with lower tax bases receive equitable education funding even though their tax base is smaller.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is it true that \$123 million in education property taxes left Calgary for other parts of the province over the last three years?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, that is patently untrue. The audited financial statements demonstrate that since 1995 the two school boards in Calgary have received about \$23 million more in property tax funding than Calgarians actually paid into education property taxes. Just to provide a couple of examples, in 1995 Calgarians paid \$335 million in education property taxes, and the school boards received \$350 million. In 1996 Calgarians paid \$335 million in education property taxes, and the school boards received \$351 million in property tax funding. In 1997 it is true that Calgarians paid \$353 million in education property taxes while the school boards received \$345 million in property tax funding, but including general revenue funding, both school boards received a total of about \$650 million for the 1996-97 year.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of how you slice the numbers, the principle of equitable funding so that every child receives a quality education is absolutely a vital and valid funding principle.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the Minister of Education. We've had a lot of growth in Calgary. Will Calgarians face a higher education property tax this year because of all of this growth?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I would like to first of all remind the members of the Assembly and Albertans that the government has dropped the provincial uniform education tax rate again this year, and this is the fifth reduction in a row in this rate.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to an individual's property tax bill, the bill will depend upon the value of their home and the local education property tax rate. But in Calgary, as in other areas of the province where there is strong economic growth, that means there are two things happening. One is an increase in property values, but also more housing starts. So an increase in the number of homeowners in the city of Calgary will mean that there will be more people able to contribute to Calgary's total education property tax bill.

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

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table four letters from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind to the Premier informing him that they were canceling the seniors' education component of their service programs due to a lack of funding. The seniors' education program of the Alberta division of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind has helped 5,350 senior citizens, established 41 support groups, and trained 62 peer facilitators to work in their home communities throughout Alberta. The CNIB's seniors' education program had a budget of \$100,000 last year, \$50,000 of which was provided by Alberta Health. The other half was raised through fund-raising and donations. This year as of April 1 their \$50,000 grant was cut. My first question to the minister

responsible for the Gaming and Liquor Commission: given that the CNIB is trying to become self-sufficient and has doubled its fund-raising, why has the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission refused to provide the CNIB with licences for the sale of Nevada pull tickets?

MRS. BLACK: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly the CNIB should be over communicating with the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. The commission is charged with the responsibility to adjudicate and regulate gaming activities within this province, not the minister responsible. They are a quasi-judicial body, and please respect that relationship. So I would encourage the CNIB to go over and sit down and work with the gaming commission directly to sort out any problems that may be there.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister responsible for seniors: can the minister explain to seniors how it is that her government can use taxpayers' money for \$35,000 luxury cars for cabinet ministers but can't find the money to help out over 5,000 seniors who are losing their sight?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, what the minister responsible for seniors in this province can do is stand here and say that seniors in this province enjoy the best programs of any seniors in Canada. I can also inform the hon. member – and I'm sure he's aware of it – that Alberta is the province of choice for seniors. So, obviously, there are some things here that seniors like: the excellent health care programs, the best allied health care programs, the best premium subsidies, universal Blue Cross, access to continuing care at a cost that is indexed to their pensions that all seniors can afford.

However, the program that the hon. member is discussing is an important program for seniors, and I think what should be recalled is not just what's happening today. Their funding was lost sometime ago, and that hon. member should ask where that funding originated and who cut the funding in the first place so that Alberta Health had to step in and assist with that program. This government has been assisting the CNIB, and the CNIB would tell this member that this minister and other ministers have worked hard with the CNIB to see that this program, which incidentally is there to support seniors with serious vision problems to be able to function as independently as possible in their communities – we have been supporting that program, not just bringing it up in the House some two, three years later.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm going to recognize the Minister of Economic Development to supplement the answer briefly, but it's obviously, Edmonton-Glengarry, a wonderful question, because we have people on both sides of the House busily trying to answer it in addition to those that you directed the question to. So I wonder if we could all listen to the brief comments of the Minister of Economic Development.

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (continued)

MRS. BLACK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just so the hon. member is aware – and I think members know that there's been a lot of debate over the allocation of lottery funds. Last year through the community facility enhancement program the Canadian National Institute for the Blind received \$125,000 in support from CFEP.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health: given that the Health minister told the CNIB to go to the RHAs for funding and that they just don't have the money, will the minister make arrangements today to restore the \$50,000 grant to the CNIB for its seniors' education program?

2:30

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it from the previous answer of the Minister of Economic Development, there is provincially based grant assistance being provided to the CNIB, which actually I guess is in excess of the amount of money that the member quoted as being reduced. But in addition to that, yes, the regional health authorities as the entities funded through government and responsible for overall services are invited to also participate in working with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Lotteries and Gaming Summit

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow the Alberta Lotteries and Gaming Summit will get under way in Medicine Hat. I know that Albertans in Fort McMurray and across this province are very interested in the summit and the findings that will emerge. My question today is to the Minister of Community Development. Could the minister explain how the summit is set up and what the format will be for delegate participation in this summit?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, when the decision was made to proceed with the gaming summit in response to the recommendation through the Lotteries Review Committee that we review gaming within three years, the Minister of Economic Development and I were charged with the responsibility, along with the very capable steering committee, of setting up the dynamics of the summit. The first thing we did, as hon. members know, was ask a very capable person by the name of the former Ombudsman, Harley Johnson, to be the chair. Mr. Johnson has worked with a small group that he has put together, a small support staff, and it is he and his staff who are designing the format of the summit and who will be operating the summit in Medicine Hat this weekend. It will begin on Thursday evening. So it is really the chairman who is doing the design.

We'll be reviewing all forms of gaming in this province, and I think that's important. About 150 delegates who will attend this will be talking about horse racing, VLTs, pull tickets, lottery tickets, bingos: all forms of gaming that do occur in the province.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask the minister if she could perhaps be a bit more specific. In light of the fact of there being so many stakeholders, who will be attending the summit and how were these delegates selected?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think that is an important point. I want to make it very clear that it was the chairman, Mr. Johnson, who did the design of how the delegates would be

selected. One, he was very diligent in ensuring that it would be balanced, that all points of view would be heard. The public members were selected through a random method. I know that there were virtually thousands of people that were considered and asked questions that validated their neutrality and ability to bring a balanced approach to the table. The groups that come from the delegate side of it are associations, organizations that may have an interest in lotteries or in how lottery moneys are spent. The other half are citizen delegates. So we're quite certain . . . [interjections]

I should also mention, hon. member, that there are members of the opposition who have been invited to attend this very important summit. I would think that for the sake of their own members who are attending, they would be just a little bit less rude through this process, because in speaking to their delegates who are going, they consider this an important summit. They are taking a weekend, as are our colleagues, to go and hear the views of Albertans in a fair and balanced way at a gaming summit.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the minister responsible for gaming. Can the minister inform this House about what happens after the summit is over?

MRS. BLACK: Well, Mr. Speaker, clearly the chair of the summit will be summarizing all of the comments and views from the participants to the gaming summit and will submit a report with recommendations to the government for our review. Keeping in mind that the chair has also made the obligation that he will accept written submissions from Albertans until the 15th of May, we expect to receive a final report from the chair of the summit, Mr. Johnson, roughly by the end of the summer.

Now, I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that it's very important for people and hon. members to realize that this is part of the commitment that was made three years ago when the Lotteries Review Committee report came forward to do a review after three years to look at where we go in the future. These recommendations will form a very good and large part of that review process that was accepted by our government because of the 18,500 submissions that came forward from Albertans in the first sets.

Mr. Speaker, it's very important, and I don't want anyone to feel that we have not gone to the people for public input on this report.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: It's important.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'm sure that it's important, but we're taking a long time on this subject.

MRS. BLACK: Well, Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence, I have to say that this has been a question that has been raised every week in this Legislature since we started this session. I think it's only fair to Albertans that we have a process that is clearly unfettered with politics to allow them to come forward as a follow-up to the original document and put their input in place.

Quite clearly, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important that all sides of this House will be there as observers, so as we go through the recommendations, we will have a firsthand view of what people felt about the future of gaming.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair's batting record on this is

not going to go down very well. We only got nine questions, one of which took nine minutes to get through and the last one nearly the same.

We'll allow a 20-second break for those that are going to leave so they don't leave when recognitions are given.

Recognitions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: While we're waiting for the people to move, I would just let you know that we've received a number of indications that people want to give recognitions. They will be in the following order: Lac La Biche-St. Paul, Edmonton-Manning, Wetaskiwin-Camrose, Edmonton-Norwood, Fort McMurray, Edmonton-Highlands, and Lacombe-Stettler.

Alberta Conservation Tillage Society

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year is the Alberta Conservation Tillage Society's 20th anniversary. It's a farmer-owned, -directed, and -operated provincial organization. Also known as ACTS, the members of this organization have been instrumental in the evolution of sustainable farming practices that enhance soil quality to produce safe food and promote a healthy environment. Soil quality is an important pillar of sustainable agriculture. Reducing tillage improves soil quality and achieves significant long-term economic and environmental benefits for the entire industry and for our society. ACTS is a founding partner of the Alberta reduced tillage initiative, which is a three-way partnership between producers, the private sector, and government. ACTS also sponsors the agriculture future farm technology expo, the largest sustainable agriculture production conference in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Conservation Tillage Society stands for soil quality, safe food, and a healthy environment.

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

Northgate Seniors' Centre

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 20, 1998, I had the privilege of bringing greetings from our new leader, Nancy MacBeth, on behalf of our Liberal caucus to the 20th anniversary celebrations of the northgate seniors' centre under the auspices of Northgate Lions. There were 370 in attendance. As part of National Volunteer Week this was the centre's volunteer appreciation night. Their aim was to recognize and celebrate the wonderful contribution the volunteers have made in the centre over the last 20 years.

The centre is the largest recreational facility for seniors in the city of Edmonton, Mr. Speaker, developed by the largest Lions Club in Edmonton. As a matter of fact, there are 1,600 members and over 118,000 people utilized the centre this last year, with 20,000 volunteer hours being logged. This is most impressive.

It is estimated that the volunteer community contributes \$1 billion to Alberta's economy each year. Every day our volunteers demonstrate their dedication to improving and enhancing the lives of others. We are very fortunate, indeed, to be blessed with the contribution of these totally committed individuals.

Thank you.

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

2:40 Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As this is National Volunteer Week, there is a group of volunteers from my constituency that I would like to recognize today. Monday evening I had the pleasure to attend the leaders of tomorrow awards presentation to four young people from the Wetaskiwin area. A similar event was held in Camrose in March to honour leaders of tomorrow award recipients from the Camrose area. These awards are given to young persons in four age categories between six and 21 years who demonstrate outstanding dedication and excellence in their volunteer work.

Thirty-two young volunteers from the Wetaskiwin area and 23 from Camrose and district were nominated to receive leaders of tomorrow awards. This year's award recipients from my constituency are Janice Goofers, Christopher Humbke, and Robbyn Lentz of Wetaskiwin; Heather Lowman of Millet; and Amanda Thompson, Heather Broen, and Adam Kristenson of Camrose. Congratulations to all award nominees and recipients for this recognition by your communities of the important work you do as volunteers. You are the volunteers of today and the leaders of tomorrow and today.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Kimberly Preston

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize the achievement of Kimberly Preston, who is a constituent in my riding of Edmonton-Norwood. Kimberly has been selected as a member of the 1998 cadet honour band of the prairie region. She is one of 100 cadets chosen from the 210 sea, army, and air cadet units across the prairies. Kimberly, a clarinet player, is a member of the 27 *Warrior* Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps. The cadet honour band of the prairie region will present concerts in Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Regina, and Edmonton on their fifth annual concert tour of the prairies.

There are 1,100 cadet units located in communities across Alberta and Canada. Their aims are to develop in youth the attributes of good citizenship and leadership, to promote physical fitness, and to stimulate interest in the sea, land, and air elements of the Canadian armed forces.

I am proud of Kimberly Preston, who has achieved a position of honour within the Canadian cadet organization and who will be representing her home community of Edmonton-Norwood as she tours western Canada with the cadet honour band, prairie region.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Dave Tuccaro

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to pay recognition to indeed a special Albertan from my constituency. Mr. Dave Tuccaro was recently singled out by the national *Financial Post* magazine as one of Canada's top 40 leaders under the age of 40. Active in bettering both the aboriginal and nonaboriginal communities in Fort McMurray and Alberta, Dave is a successful businessman and community leader. He is a Mikisew Cree from Fort Chipewyan in the Athabasca-Wabasca constituency. Dave is the president and owner of two successful

companies in Fort McMurray. He sat on the regional health authority, the Alberta Chamber of Resources, the national task force on aboriginal development and financing, the National Task Force on Oil Sands Strategy, and was recently elected president of the National Aboriginal Business Association.

This is indeed a select and prestigious honour, and I know I speak for all of Fort McMurray and all of Alberta in expressing how proud we are of Dave for the honour that was bestowed on him this past week. I congratulate him as a proud Albertan, one who truly represents the Alberta advantage.

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

Dave Thiele

MS BARRETT: I rise to congratulate Dave Thiele, the 1998 recipient of the Jim Shewchuk award for his outstanding contributions to his union, the community, and the United Way. Dave has been involved in public life on a number of fronts. As a longtime member of CUPE local 30 he has held many union executive positions and served on numerous committees. He has also served as vice-president of the Edmonton and District Labour Council and chairperson of the Alberta Workers' Health Centre. Dave has been actively involved in the Mill Woods community, including such roles as community league president and director of the Mill Woods Cultural and Recreational Facility Association. Dave has worked hard to organize local sports through involved effort with the Mill Woods soccer association, and he's a founder of the Mill Woods Warriors soccer club.

Dave Thiele has demonstrated a strong commitment to bettering the lives of others through exceptional work in his community, the labour movement, and sports involvement. He is truly a deserving recipient of the 1998 Jim Shewchuk award and sets an example for us all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Evening to Remember

MRS. GORDON: After seven months of planning by a volunteer committee of 24 women An Evening to Remember charity fashion show came to life April 18 in Lacombe. Featured and on hand was Alberta's own, the very talented Brian Bailey, who is today considered one of Canada's top, award-winning fashion designers. Incidentally, some of Bailey's regular customers include Dini Petty, Pamela Wallin, and Rosie O'Donnell. Special guests included former *CFRN News* anchor Daphne Kuehn and popular talk show host Dini Petty. The biggest winners of the evening were those charities who are recipients of the proceeds. Thirteen thousand dollars went to the central Alberta chapter of the MS Society, \$3,500 to Lacombe and District Big Brothers and Big Sisters.

Congratulations to Trudy Bailey and all those who willingly worked with her. Indeed a job well done. I hope it will become an annual event.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 92 and 93.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon.

Deputy Government House Leader, would the members in favour of this motion please say aye?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It would appear that the motion has failed.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 2:47 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Amery | Haley | O'Neill |
| Barrett | Hancock | Pannu |
| Black | Havelock | Paszkowski |
| Bonner | Jacques | Paul |
| Boutilier | Johnson | Pham |
| Broda | Jonson | Renner |
| Burgener | Klapstein | Severtson |
| Cao | Kryczka | Shariff |
| Cardinal | Laing | Smith |
| Clegg | Langevin | Soetaert |
| Coutts | MacDonald | Stelmach |
| Dickson | Magnus | Strang |
| Doerksen | Mar | Tarchuk |
| Ducharme | Marz | Thurber |
| Dunford | Massey | Trynchy |
| Forsyth | McClellan | West |
| Friedel | Mitchell | White |
| Fritz | Oberg | Yankowsky |
| Gordon | Olsen | Zwozdesky |
| Graham | | |

Totals: For - 58 Against - 0

[Motion carried]

3:00 Privatization

Q92. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted: What are the costs and benefits, detailed item by item and program by program, for the ministries of Labour and Municipal Affairs accruing to Albertans as a result of the privatization and contracting out of government services since 1993?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping for the same overwhelming endorsement on this question. We will be rejecting this question.

Mr. Speaker, let me just speak to win more hearts and minds for the vote. Let me just speak for a moment on this. The Department of Labour's annual budgets and public accounts provide item-by-item information on the program costs that have

been requested by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. The information is there. It's all in the public record. All the individual has to do is go through the research necessary. I realize that research dollars are always at a premium, but there is financial and other information on programs and services that have been privatized or outsourced.

I think I should add, Mr. Speaker, because there is interest in the delegated administrative organizations, that every private and nonprofit DAO with which the Department of Labour has a delegation agreement produces an annual report, and many of them now produce three-year business plans. These documents are all publicly available, such as the one tabled earlier today on the Safety Codes Council. This information that the member seeks is widely available from all these documents. I would suggest that he'll have ample time over the summer solstice to be able to examine those in detail. I understand that the Department of Municipal Affairs does not have this information at this level of detail.

Therefore, for those sound reasons, Mr. Speaker, the government is rejecting Written Question 92.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to close debate.

DR. PANNU: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to close debate on it. I'm disappointed by the answer to my question and the reasons that the Minister of Labour has so kindly provided the members of this House and the people of this province. I'm disappointed because these questions arose precisely because the public accounts' examination did not yield the information that we were seeking there. That's why these questions are there on the Order Paper.

For the minister to say that this information is easily available, that it's public information is a paradoxical statement to say the least. If it were so, then the minister has all the resources at his disposal, through the staff of his department, to put this information together and bring it to the House, to make it available to this House and also, through this House, to my constituents who ask these questions day in and day out because they are wondering what the privatization policies of this government have brought in terms of benefits to them as taxpayers, as voters, as citizens of this province.

This information simply is not easily available. This government makes claims about being transparent, about being open, about being accountable, and I am really shocked to hear that the Minister of Labour would stand up and say that making this kind of information available to this House is not part of his understanding of what accountability is all about. This is a government that seems to want to make its case on the basis of its openness. Where is that openness, I wonder. I ask that question. I challenge the Minister of Labour to answer the question: where is that openness?

There is no openness here. It's a secretive government. It's a government . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Do you have a . . .

MR. SMITH: Is the hon. member asking me a question under *Beauchesne*?

DR. PANNU: No. I asked you the question. You had the chance.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Questioning a Member

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It was my understanding that under *Beauchesne* 333 the hon. member would be asking me a question, which I'd be prepared to answer.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the hon. member has that one slightly turned around. It certainly is *Beauchesne* 333, but that's when a member wishes to ask another member who's speaking a question.

MR. SMITH: *Beauchesne* 333, Mr. Speaker. Would the member entertain a question?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's being asked of you to entertain a question. All you have to do is say yes or no. If the answer is no, continue your speech. If the answer is yes, sit down and let him ask the question.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm not asking the Minister of Labour any questions. I gave him a chance by way of a written question. He said: no, he's not going to answer it. So I have no questions for him as such. It's my question, and I'm simply speaking to close the debate. I hope the Minister of Labour will be kind enough to let me proceed.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, it's a strange sight when a government which claims to have 63 seats in this Legislature, which claims to have been returned by resounding support from the voters of this province, does not have the courage to stand in this House and lay before us the facts that will prove whether or not the claims it is making are true or false. I can only conclude from the response I got to my question that this government has something very serious, something terrible to hide about the policies that we're pursuing.

It should be noted that on the policy of privatization and the policy of contracting out, while justified in this House and in this province by this government for reasons of the benefits – economic benefits, the savings to taxpayers their policy will bring – when we ask what are those benefits and can you produce any proof that there have been benefits as a result of those policies, the answer is: we will not give you the information; it's available all over.

Obviously the private registries is a very good case. It's unregulated, there's no information available, and user costs are going up year after year, every six months. There's no regulation when they can go up; they can go up any time. Those registries affect nearly every one of the citizens of this province. They're privacy protected. There's no way the public can get any information on it. Yet this government wants to claim that it's made these policy decisions, has enacted these laws in order to save all of us money. I'm asking: where are those savings? Either they answer that question or they go and re-examine those policies and abandon them if they don't work.

Public policies are there to protect and serve public interest. There has to be some way of measuring, some way of finding out whether or not those policies that are designed and claim to be serving the public interest are indeed doing that. How do we find

that out if you're not providing any information? In an open and transparent government one thing that we expect to hear from them is proof of the claims they make to justify their policies. We are told now there's no need for proof, and if you need the information, go on your own, go on a wild chase. If you find something, fine. If you don't, too bad; we are not accountable.

Mr. Speaker, to not be accountable in a democracy is an affront to democracy itself. So I would hope that the members on the other side of the House will reconsider their position and that the Minister of Labour in particular will reconsider his position and stand up in this House and say that he will provide this information I'm requesting. I'm willing to accept it at a later date. All the minister has to do to become accountable to the citizens of this province is to change his mind and say, yes, I will provide the information in the interest of transparency, in the interest of openness, in the interest of democracy.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

3:10 Synthetic Crude Oil and Bitumen Royalties

Q93. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted: What is the explanation for the drop in royalties for synthetic crude oil and bitumen from \$512 million in the 1996-97 fiscal year to \$50 million in the 1998-99 fiscal year, government estimates 1998-99, how much of this drop-off is due to anticipated lower prices, and how much is due to the capital write-off provisions of the transition agreements and the generic royalty terms?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this question because I think it's fair. It's a fair question to ask on behalf of the people of Alberta. The only comment I might make on it is that it was asked in the Committee of Supply when I was presenting the estimates for the Department of Energy. The hon. member asked the question directly, and I answered it then and followed it up with written information, not specifically as it states here.

Also on this question I could only ask that the member in the future doesn't take a question and answer it in the same question. He looks surprised.

What is the explanation for the drop in royalties for synthetic crude oil and bitumen from \$512 million in the 1996-97 fiscal year to \$50 million in the 1998-99 fiscal year?

Then he turns around and says, "How much of this drop-off is due to anticipated lower prices?" which is the first answer, going from \$22.50 a barrel down to our estimate of \$17.50, and now we're probably running – the Treasurer isn't here – much lower than that. He answered the question of how much of this drop is due to anticipated lower prices. Although the amount isn't there, you've answered your own question. You know that part of the reason for the drop is because of lower oil prices.

"How much is due to the capital write-off provisions of the transition agreements and the generic royalty terms?" That's the other answer. I will be getting those.

I accept this question, but as I say, I think there are easier ways for you to attain this information than tying up the time of the House. You could come directly to me, and I would give it to you. I will table the answers or have somebody table them tomorrow, but I just say that you've had ample time. You had time in estimates and in . . . [interjection]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: This is a debate. Each in their turn. Right now the Minister of Energy has the floor.

DR. WEST: I did say in respect to the individual that it is an important question for the people of Alberta to understand how these royalties go up and down and what part the new generic royalty terms play in that. As we got the \$19 billion worth of investment so far up in the Fort McMurray area, that creates jobs and has tremendous spin-off for Albertans, it is important to explain how that happens, and I'll be glad to do that. I accept Question 93.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to move acceptance.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to be very brief. I want to thank the minister for having accepted the question. I certainly would hope that the answer will be forthcoming soon. Otherwise, I'll be asking this question again in the next session, in the fall.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

MRS. BLACK: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 94, and 95.

[Motion carried]

Notwithstanding Clause

M84. Mr. Dickson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all analyses of section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and analyses of circumstances for invocation of section 33 prepared by or for the government in the last year with respect to the possible application of section 33 by the government.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise that we will be rejecting this motion. The motion for a return is declined because the material referred to would constitute legal advice to the government of Alberta. This material would be subject to solicitor/client privilege, and producing it could result in a waiver of privilege which may harm the government's legal position in matters before the courts.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think this was a motion very sincerely put forward by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. I think in this province today people are afraid of when that notwithstanding clause is going to come up, who it's going to apply to, and who it's going to affect. Because a clause that nobody in Alberta knew about for years suddenly has been used twice – twice – in recent weeks in this Legislature, people across the province are worried. They want to know: how did this come up here? This is what this section is about. They want to know how you ever came up with the notwithstanding clause and what the history is behind pulling it out and using it like this

at random. I think we have a right to know and the people of Alberta have a right to know the process that happened, how it got to be in this Legislature and out in the public.

I'm disappointed that the minister is rejecting it. Either he doesn't know how it happened and it just showed up on his desk and he pulled it in, or it's a concerted effort by some people to put something forward. I don't know, but I think that's the question: how did it get here? On whose advice? What studies were done, if any? I would just like an explanation. I am very disappointed that we didn't get it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will echo the same concerns as my colleague from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo asked this in good faith. I'm really displeased with the answer of the hon. minister that they are not going to comply with the request. I think we have to recognize that the notwithstanding clause has been used twice in this sitting.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's been threatened to be used.

MS PAUL: It's been threatened to be used. I'm sorry. For clarification.

MRS. BLACK: Point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister is rising on a point of order. Do you have a citation?

Point of Order

Factual Accuracy

MRS. BLACK: Section 23(h), (i). I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member is passing incorrect information forward. The notwithstanding clause was not used twice in this session. I would ask her to refrain from doing that.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: On the point of order, Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Madam Minister. If you had listened, I did already correct my statement.

On another point, I think Albertans need . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you've clarified it, then it needs to be concluded. If that's satisfactory to all, then we'd ask you to continue your points on this.

MS PAUL: Thank you. Yes.

Debate Continued

MS PAUL: Well, back to Motion for a Return 84, which has been brought forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. As I've already mentioned, he did it in good faith, and I think it needs to be answered. Mr. Speaker, I think Albertans want some sort of understanding and clear thinking to be relayed to them by this government. We need to have some accountability and clear understanding of what's happening in this House.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The public concern that was expressed related to Bill 26 earlier on in this session is I think clear evidence of the fact that there's a very high level of public interest in getting this information that's being requested by this motion. I am puzzled why the Minister of Justice would reject the request made in this return out of hand. As minister responsible for justice, as minister responsible for maintaining this government and its position related to the Constitution of this country in ways that are acceptable and that conform to the constitutional norms of this country, he should be happy, in fact, to be providing this information to all of us. That's why I'm puzzled for such a reasonable request to be turned down by a minister who until a few days ago seemed to have learned from his own mistake. Clearly old habits die hard. The response of the minister is clear proof of the fact that this minister is not able or willing to learn from his own mistakes. This House has the responsibility to protect the constitutional rights of each and every one of us in this province. The Minister of Justice is legally required to do the same in our name, in the name of the people of this province.

It is in that spirit, then, that this information is being sought. This information should be made public, and this information is something that should be coming forth without special requests having to be made by members of this House. So I'm deeply disappointed by the response of this minister, and I hope he changes his mind.

3:20

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just three reasons why I think the motion should have been accepted. First of all, I think by accepting it and providing the information, the confidence of citizens can be returned in terms of the kinds of processes that are used by the government to make decisions. I think that confidence was badly shaken by the action of the government with regards to Bill 26. By providing this information, it would help repair the damage that was done at that time.

The most important reason though, of course, is that considering exercising use of that section really struck at the freedom of a group of citizens. I can't think of anything the government would be more anxious to dispel than the notion that they were attacking the freedom of citizens of this province or anywhere else. So I think that probably is the most important reason.

Third, for all those other vulnerable groups that sort of held their breath after that bill was introduced, I think this information would be of great value to them so that they fully understand what happened.

So for those three reasons alone I think the government should accept and provide the information.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank those members who participated in the debate for their thoughtful and heartfelt comments in support of this particular motion for a return. What's being requested here – let's be very clear – are copies of analyses done with respect to the implication of section

33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That's the section that allows a provincial government to in effect suspend the constitutional rights of citizens for up to five years.

This is not an academic exercise. This is not some kind of a frivolous, wholly irrelevant pursuit. We have seen in this Legislative Assembly two events of cataclysmic proportions in terms of engagement of Albertans, in terms of heightened concern, in terms of dramatic and substantial erosion of people's confidence in the ability of legislators and the executive branch to do the appropriate thing, to treat and ensure that all Albertans are treated with a sense of equality and in a respectful way.

What are those things I speak of? Well, the first one was the introduction – it seems like months ago, but it was only a matter of weeks ago that Bill 27 was brought forward. Bill 26 I guess. We've had so many contentious bills this session, Mr. Speaker, that I have trouble sorting out all the numbers. Bill 26 came in, and that bill for the first time in the history of this Assembly – and I'm not sure I ever expected in my lifetime to see my government make an attempt to suspend the rights of citizens, to be able to beat up on 700 wrongfully sexually sterilized Albertans. But we saw that bill come in, and what we saw with the introduction of that bill was not just a piece of paper. What we saw was something that, if not severed, dramatically weakened the sort of bond that exists between legislators and legislated. It took that sometimes tenuous thread between Albertans as citizens and the people in whom they repose the ability to protect them, hopefully lead them, inspire them, and it severely damaged that thread, that connection.

Then we saw another issue come along, and that was the government's response to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in the Vriend case. Just a scant few days after Bill 26 we listened with rapt attention and amazement to the Premier say that they were considering invocation of section 33 yet again, this time to ensure that all of us could potentially be discriminated against on the basis of our sexual orientation. The Premier, we will remember, couldn't quite make his mind up on that, so he took a week to determine how many phone calls were coming in and then announced the decision not to use it.

But the point that the government was prepared to use it in Bill 26, the fact that they had it under active consideration to use it yet a second time, even after the outpouring of concern and outrage from citizens after Bill 26, leaves us all shaking our heads on what possible basis the government would consider rolling out this constitutional howitzer to be able to deal with basic fundamental freedoms of Alberta citizens, Canadian citizens.

Now, the request is for copies of analyses. I would have thought the government had done a number of analyses. You would, yes, get legal advice – and I'll come back and deal with that in a moment – but I also expect and believe this government had done some polling, and I expect they probably had some assessment done of the political fallout, the political damage with invocation of the notwithstanding clause, section 33 of the Charter. The Minister of Justice leaves us with the impression that the only analysis that was done was a legal opinion or legal opinions. That's a curious thing, because we've heard suggestions that there was much broader analysis done, and we've learned something this afternoon that we didn't know before. What we've learned is that this government relied solely on legal opinion, and there was no other analysis done of what might be involved in terms of invoking the notwithstanding clause.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Then we heard the Minister of Justice stand up and say: solicitor/client privilege. Now, this is the biggest boogeyman we've heard all session. Solicitor/client privilege is there for who? It's for the benefit of the client, not the benefit of the lawyers. It's the benefit of the client. Who would the client be when the government of Alberta seeks a legal opinion? Well, the client is not the Minister of Justice; it's the people of Alberta, the very people of Alberta whose rights are at risk with the invocation of section 33 of the Charter.

So we have the most preposterous tautology. We've got the most preposterous assertion by the government that what they would suggest is that in the name of the people we're going to refuse to share with the people the basis on which we would suspend their constitutional rights. The Minister of Justice is perfectly entitled under the freedom of information act and he's perfectly entitled under the common law dealing with solicitor/client privilege to say on behalf of the people of Alberta: we're going to share with you the legal opinions that you have paid for, the legal opinions obtained ostensibly on your behalf, and we're going to share with you the analysis that's been done so you can understand in an informed fashion what those criteria were. But the Minister of Justice instead says, "I'm going to invoke solicitor/client privilege." Why? "Because there may be some prejudice. I've received some advice."

3:30

If I were flippant I might say: were those the same lawyers who advised you that you could use section 33 with impunity in Bill 26? Were those the same lawyers who presumably encouraged the government that section 33 was a possible remedy they would invoke to ensure that discriminatory practices could continue in this province against Albertans, gay or straight? Because we all have a sexual orientation. Anyway, extremely disappointing. The suggestion that solicitor/client privilege somehow resolves it is absolute foolishness.

If we look at section 26 of the freedom of information act, "the head of a public body may refuse to disclose to an applicant," if this were a FOIP application, information subject to "solicitor-client privilege." Why is it discretionary, not mandatory? Because the client can decide, not the lawyer but the client, that for a host of reasons the information should be shared. And because the information is shared in this case on a matter of enormous public significance and enormous public interest, it's preposterous to suggest that the government of Alberta and the Department of Justice are going to be prejudiced in some future legal case to use it again. Now, they may be prejudiced if they are planning on invoking section 33 again, and that's the really interesting implication of the Minister of Justice trying to hide behind this kind of a shield in this case.

It looks to me like the government didn't learn its lesson with Bill 26, and it looks to me like this government still has under active consideration using the notwithstanding clause, and who knows what group they want to pick on next. But Albertans want to know. Albertans want to know whether it's a poll of phone numbers. They want to know if it's the number of faxes the minister of transportation has got that's going to decide whether this is going to be used.

Madam Speaker, I can't think of very many pieces of information, very many documents that this government would have access to where one could have built a more compelling case for production, a more compelling case to share that information with Albertans, and all we get from the Minister of Justice is a comment that he's relying on solicitor/client privilege. Well, that

Minister of Justice can hide behind all of the legal fictions and all of the legal defences that he can put up, but Albertans know better. Albertans can see right through that. I think there's something, obviously, the government has to hide, and I think if there was concern and apprehension before this motion was responded to by the minister, there should be abject fear on the part of Albertans given the response of the Minister of Justice.

Madam Speaker, the lessons we've learned from this would be – I guess I can summarize three. Firstly, the government still has under active consideration invocation of section 33 again. They haven't learned their lesson, and that's a frightening message we take from the Minister of Justice's comments.

The second comment we take is that all they have done is get a legal analysis of section 33. There has been no other report and no other analysis done by the government of Alberta. Contrary to what many of us had heard from chatty Conservative caucus members, contrary to what many of us have heard from other sources, it appears that the Minister of Justice is going to attempt to assert there was no other study and no other analysis done. If we should find out that some other analysis has been done around section 33 – well, we won't go down that road. The minister was very clear in claiming the solicitor/client privilege. We're entitled to read into that the implications that necessarily follow from it.

The third lesson is that this government doesn't accept the enormous responsibility that goes along with protecting the rights of its citizens. They still see this as we against them. They still see this as constitutional rights are something they're able to suspend at their will, and that's sad. Indeed, that's a tragic proposition. There's a reason we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms and a reason why legislators and governments accepted it. It is because some basic rights are more important than the will of an enormously huge majority government.

We look at Canadian history and wish that there were a Charter of Rights and Freedoms at the time that Canadians of Japanese descent living on the west coast of Canada had their fishing boats impounded and were forcibly moved to southern Alberta. You know, if there had been a Charter of Rights and Freedoms then, that would not have happened.

AN HON. MEMBER: The Liberals were in power then.

MR. DICKSON: It doesn't matter what party's in power, Mr. Minister, and that's exactly the point. This isn't about partisanship, and it's not about politicking.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Through the chair, please.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, it's about respecting the rights of Albertans. The fact that this government won't share with us the criteria that they're using for the next three years of this government's term, all Albertans and particularly Albertans in minority . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Four years.

MR. DICKSON: Well, another hope shattered, Madam Speaker. Okay. For another four years Albertans are going to have to keep looking over their shoulder and they're going to have to keep wondering when the hammer is going to drop and when their particular group is going to be picked on by the government of Alberta, and they're going to suspend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to do that. At a time when one would hope the government would want to put all of that behind them and say that they've learned the lessons from this session, that they've learned

the lessons from Bill 26 and they've learned the lessons from the Vriend decision, what we find is that the government hasn't paid any attention to those things. They're still anxious to preserve majority power, and that's not good enough. It's a sad day for Alberta. It's a sad day for Albertans.

What some members forget is that we're in a constitutional democracy, and what that means is that there are some things that even big powerful governments can't override, that there are some fundamental rights that are more important than the mandate of a particular government. That's what it's all about, yet we still have ministers who think it's majority rule and tough luck for the little guy, that it's all a question of majority. Some members opposite would probably argue for the proposition that there's nothing they should be prevented from doing. As long as they decide to do it, they should be able to do it. Well, I reject that proposition, Madam Speaker, and I think my caucus rejects that proposition.

I'll just conclude by saying again that this is a sad day for Albertans. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, are you agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:39 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Dickson | Mitchell | Paul |
| MacDonald | Olsen | Soetaert |
| Massey | Pannu | Zwozdesky |

3:50

Against the motion:

| | | |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Black | Herard | Paszkowski |
| Broda | Hierath | Pham |
| Burgener | Jacques | Renner |
| Cao | Jonson | Severtson |
| Cardinal | Kryczka | Shariff |
| Clegg | Laing | Stelmach |
| Doerksen | Langevin | Strang |
| Ducharme | Magnus | Tarchuk |
| Forsyth | Mar | Thurber |
| Friedel | Marz | Trynchy |
| Fritz | McClellan | West |
| Graham | Melchin | Yankowsky |
| Haley | Oberg | |

| | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|
| Totals: | For – 9 | Against – 38 |
|---------|---------|--------------|

[Motion lost]

Loans and Loan Guarantees

M85. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all annual and interim financial statement analyses prepared by the ministry of Treasury as set out under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees procedures manual for the period January 1, 1996, to January 26, 1998, underlying the monitoring of guarantees provided to Canadian Airlines International Ltd., Kananaskis Alpine Resort Inc., Centre for Frontier Engineering Research, Pocaterra Development Corporation, and North Saskatchewan River Boat Ltd.

MRS. BLACK: Madam Speaker, on behalf of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer I unfortunately am going to have to reject Motion for a Return 85. The reason that we have to reject this motion – I'll refer hon. members again to *Beauchesne* 446(2)(e), which concerns itself with financial disclosure for businesses or third-party interests. Also, section 16.2.C.(1)(j)(vii)(3) in *Erskine May* applies in that information may be refused if it pertains to companies or bodies that are not under statutory authority or control of the government. More generally, section 16.2.C.(1)(j)(ix) applies in that disclosure of information may be refused “upon grounds of public policy.”

I also refer hon. members to the freedom of information act, section 15 and section 24. The request, Madam Speaker, for financial statement analyses does contain commercially confidential financial information submitted by borrowers in compliance with reporting requirements under loan guarantee agreements. Disclosure of this information could reasonably result in legal claims against the Crown if the borrower suffered damage from disclosure of this information. We therefore must reject the motion.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very disappointed, once again, that this government can't tell us what they're doing as far as monitoring guarantees. That's what the request is: monitoring the guarantees. We know that there's a guaranteed loan out there. Somebody has money guaranteed to them. Who's monitoring it? Unless no one is. [interjection] You want me to speak softer? I'll speak softer, because I respect the poor people who work up in the gallery.

You know, I can't help but speak with passion about the inability of this government to show us where the money goes, to show us how it's being monitored. They're the first ones to speak up about: oh, education has to cut back; health care has to cut back. But they never show us who's monitoring the money that's gone to Canadian Airlines International, Kananaskis Alpine Resort, Centre for Frontier Engineering Research, Pocaterra Development Corporation, and North Saskatchewan River Boat, which is sadly not afloat, I don't think.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, it is.

MRS. SOETAERT: It is floating now. It is floating.

So we just really want to know for the people of Alberta. It says: to protect third-party interests. You know what? It's the people of Alberta's money. They have a right to know. If you're a company doing a deal with the government, is there a problem in not disclosing what you're getting paid? There shouldn't be.

So why aren't you showing us? I'm getting tired of this bunk about third-party protection; I really am. I know that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who truly understands that Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act better than any other person in this province, is going to argue that one as well.

MR. DICKSON: Don't get carried away.

MRS. SOETAERT: I've praised him a little higher than he wants, I know.

I think the government continues to use that to hide behind. I have asked: show me the money. I've sung: where is the money? I've said time and time again that people in this province want to know where the money is. I want to know. Is anybody monitoring what's happening with that money? If they're truly monitoring the money, how about letting us know how they're doing it? Unless of course it's not being done.

So with those few words of concern, Madam Speaker, I'm very disappointed that this motion is being rejected.

Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: Just a few brief points, Madam Speaker. I understood the hon. Minister of Economic Development to say there were two reasons the information was declined. The first one was section 15, and the second one, section 24 under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Firstly, section 24 is a discretionary exception, not a mandatory exception. That means that's no reason for the minister to refuse the information. In other words, if you have a statute that says that the minister may or may not disclose information, she can't come in here and simply put the section on the table and say that's a reason not to disclose it. The most she can say is that section 24 is absolutely neutral. She still has to take responsibility and offer some reasons in terms of why she wouldn't provide it.

The other section she used, section 15. We've been through this a few times on Wednesday afternoons. The opposition has repeatedly said to the government: if you're going to invoke section 15 as a reason, reasoning by analogy, even though it's not a formal freedom of information application, what you have to do is come in and tell us which parts of the test. There are about eight different elements to section 15; one of them is when the party consents. Now, the minister may have said that. I didn't hear her say that they had approached any of these entities to seek their consent and said: notwithstanding the fact you had a guarantee and the taxpayer stood behind you when you needed some help, now those same taxpayers want a degree of information, a degree of accountability.

As good corporate citizens these corporations, I think, continue – I haven't gone through the list – to do business in Alberta: Canadian Airlines, Kananaskis. I would think that those corporations do a great deal of business with the citizens of this province. I think they appreciated the support they got from the province when they needed it, but I think they're also sophisticated enough to know that if you want support from the taxpayers of Alberta, the quid pro quo is that the bar in terms of disclosure is a little higher, and you're going to have to provide some additional information.

If you're going to use section 15, Madam Minister, tell us what elements. Tell us expressly whether you have sought permission from the third party to disclose, because that's part of the test. Tell us what parts. If you look at section 15(1)(c), there are some tests there. Frankly, I suspect that with the kind of disclosure

requirements that Canadian Airlines has to provide as a publicly traded company, there are not a lot of secrets those corporations have. They are already held to a high measure of disclosure. I think they're sophisticated enough not to be running and hiding just because somebody in the Legislature says: let's see the analysis that's been done in that respect. It's historical analysis, in any event, because it only goes to January 26, 1998.

4:00

DR. WEST: You were lobbying for this.

MR. DICKSON: You're darn right I was, Minister of Energy. I was anxious to see that Canadian Airlines be supported by this government. But what I advocated, Mr. Minister, was reducing the fuel tax. That was two years before this government . . . [interjection] Yeah, it took two years to get around to it. There were a lot of suggestions that were made at that time.

My point, Madam Speaker, is simply this: section 15 and section 24 set out specific tests. I expect that for this minister or any other minister who is going to try and hide, if you will, behind the FOIP Act, the standard is higher. Two reactions. The first one: it's absolutely perverse to have somebody come in and use the FOIP Act as a shield to try and hide information. That's, in effect, what's happening. [interjection] If the Minister of Energy would spend more of his energy reading the text of the motion for a return on the Order Paper and less volunteering gratuitous advice, we'd all be a lot further ahead. I'd encourage him to read the text. I think if he read the text of it, he'd be voting with those of us who want the information. So I encourage him to do that.

Those are the observations. Thanks very much, Madam Speaker.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll just make a few comments with respect to Motion for a Return 85. I think it's very simplistic in the request that we just want some accountability done. We want the financial statement of analysis that is already prepared by the ministry of Treasury. I think the Provincial Treasurer has always claimed that the government is very stringent in its monitoring of loan guarantee arrangements.

So I think it's in the best interests of all of us. It's taxpayers' money. We want accountability. We want to know how, why, when, where. It's just a very straightforward request, and it cites the time frame, which is not too stringent and not too overbearing. Madam Speaker, I think that it should be noted that since 1993 there have been nearly \$300 million in payments made under guarantee by this government. This suggests that the monitoring may not be as vigilant as the Treasurer would suggest, and I think that has to be noted. There has to be some accountability done.

Sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees manual of Alberta Treasury analyze the financial statement reports. They should encompass a number of things that should be examined. They should, in fact, identify key terms of financial assistance. They should encompass review and highlight profitability. They should highlight cash flow. I mean, there's a whole list of things. The net profit margin should also be included. Those are according to, as I said, sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Madam Speaker, we've been hearing time and time again in this Legislative Assembly: no, we will not provide information. Members across the way stand up and say: no, it's not available;

no, you will not be given that information. My understanding when I was first elected in this Legislative Assembly was that this government claims to be open and accountable, and I'm just wondering where that open and accountable prerequisite of these members sitting in this Legislative Assembly is. I don't see it. Taxpayers in Alberta don't see it. My constituents in Edmonton-Castle Downs don't see it.

I think that it behooves this government to be accountable, to be open, to open the books to Albertans. Let us have a preview of what's going on in this province. They claim that there's an Alberta advantage, but it's very hidden. I think we need some accountability, and opening the books is one way of doing it. The government talks and claims; everything that's questioned in the House comes back in terms of dollars and cents and profit margins, and it's actually quite shameful when you think of what's happening in this province. This is just another one of these measures of lack of accountability from this government, and I think it's something that should be addressed.

So with those few comments, Madam Speaker, I'll finish my comments on Motion 85.

MR. MITCHELL: You know, as much as there is that seems to change in this House, Madam Speaker, after almost 12 years – in fact, in three weeks I'm here 12 years, over a decade.

MR. CLEGG: Same here.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah, Glen was there. We've been through a lot together. What we've been through together in particular is something that has never changed.

MR. SEVERTSON: You stay on that side, and he stays on this side.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you, God, for that.

I can remember having this very discussion in 1986 and the very same answer from this government, and that is that they were not going to release information about loans, guarantees, and that kind of thing that were given, backed with public money. If an enterprise gets public money, it should simply be a given that the public should know where that money goes, what it's been used for, some basic, fundamental facts about the nature of the loan and the conditions within it.

DR. WEST: Is it the same with all holders of a Treasury Branch loan? Is that what you're saying?

MR. MITCHELL: No. I guess that's politically independent; isn't it?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Energy, I will allow you to be the next speaker, if you like. Edmonton-McClung has got the floor, please.

Go ahead, Edmonton-McClung.

MR. MITCHELL: I guess we'd really have to explain to the Minister of Energy about the differences, but while he raises a more complicated issue, it certainly isn't something that complicates this issue.

We're not talking about every Treasury Branch loan. We're talking about a loan to Kananaskis Alpine Resort Inc., which is headed by some pretty significant Conservative supporters.

[interjections] It is, and all the more reason to have full disclosure. Maybe there would be fewer people willing to support you if that happened. That's the nub of the problem and that's the nub of the case right there: they don't want people to know because they would lose support. Kananaskis Alpine Resort Inc. gets a special deal which amounts to a subsidy on the rent that they pay Albertans for one of the most remarkable pieces of land and locations on the very face of the Earth. I guess it is too much to ask, but it doesn't seem to be too much to ask that the people of Alberta should know the terms of that loan.

We look at the North Saskatchewan River Boat Ltd. You know, there was a classic effort to buy votes in Edmonton; wasn't it? And did it work? No, it didn't work.

4:10

AN HON. MEMBER: Did it float?

MR. MITCHELL: Well, it's floating. It was almost the *Titanic* of Edmonton. I'm thinking: how does that song go? So near, so far? We always feel like we want to get closer, nearer to open, accountable government, yet, Madam Speaker, in fact we are so, so far away from that.

Let me address the question of Pocater Development Corporation. That doesn't sound like a government corporation; does it? That sounds like an independent, private-enterprise corporation, which has accepted money, which has accepted public, taxpayers' money, which the Minister of Energy would generally be very sensitive about except that he has these special relationships with certain businesses.

DR. WEST: A point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

DR. WEST: Under Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). He's alleging certain innuendos here in the Assembly that just aren't true, and I want him to retract that last statement.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, hon. member.

MR. MITCHELL: Madam Speaker, I admit that I did that merely and solely to get the minister's goat, and I did. I am very, very sorry for having done that. I withdraw it.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, just before you proceed, on this very thing can we not just proceed with the business of the day instead of having interjections and interaction and reaction back and forth? Let us proceed and get through these motions for returns. The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung has apologized. The chair recognizes that. I would ask if everyone can keep their emotions under control, and let's proceed.

MR. MITCHELL: If everybody could be as even emotionally in here as I am, Madam Speaker, you wouldn't have had to say that. You know, I started this speech by saying that some things never change, and one of the greatest consistencies in this Legislature over the last 12 years that I've shared this room with the Minister of Energy is that there has not been a speech that I've given, I think, in which he hasn't interrupted me. I look upon it as punctuation. It's as common as a period in a paragraph.

Debate Continued

MR. MITCHELL: Madam Speaker, there are other loans that were referred to in this motion for a return. I could go on, but I am having déjà vu. It was an afternoon just like this – hot, sunny, tepid in here, intense, emotional – and we were asking for information.

MRS. SOETAERT: On NovAtel, I betcha.

MR. MITCHELL: NovAtel was one of them. We were asking for basic, fundamental information that should have underlined so easily a government's commitment to open and accountable governance. As disappointed as I was there 12 years ago to receive the answer that I am again receiving today, Madam Speaker, I am 12 times as disappointed today.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to conclude debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, I'm almost speechless. However, I do want to make a few brief comments, Madam Speaker, with respect to Motion 85, since it was I who proposed it. Now that it's my turn, I shall do just that.

I have to say at the outset, hon. Minister of Economic Development, that I am disappointed that the Treasurer has requested you to on his behalf reject this motion. I think there must be perhaps some misunderstanding of what's intended with the motion, so I just want to explain here that all we're looking for is the analysis. We are simply looking for the analysis of each of the annual and/or interim financial statements as they relate to the guarantees portion of the loan.

You of course are aware, hon. members, that there is a special section within the Treasury Department, within the loans and guarantees procedural manual, that allows for and in fact requires these types of analyses to be done. That's what we're asking for: just the analyses. We're not asking for anything beyond that, and I'm hoping that after the debate is all concluded here and before the vote, there might possibly be a change of heart, and I'll tell you why. Because we know that it's not the current government who got into these deals. We know that, and we acknowledge that openly. However, it is this government who is attempting to and already has, in some cases, gotten us out of those logjams. We may not have agreed with many of the exit strategies, and there are others to come that we may disagree with. However, you were charged with that particular task, and you have acted upon it.

This particular motion simply asks for some additional information on some of the loan guarantees that are before you. In a nonincriminating way we are asking for that information to be provided for the benefit of all members in the House and for the benefit of Albertans, who are all wondering what's gone on with these loans. It shouldn't have to be shrouded in a veil of secrecy.

While I can appreciate the references, Madam Speaker, to I believe it was *Beauchesne* 446, where there's mention made of privacy arrangements with respect to government and private-enterprise relations, and also to *Erskine May* 16 or 17 I believe it was, where similar comments with respect to confidentiality and disclosure are made, that nonetheless doesn't extinguish the requirement of government to be as open, honest, transparent, accountable, and as forthcoming as they possibly could be. In fact, that is the OATH – openness, accountability, transparency, and honesty – which I have charged the Provincial Treasurer with

delivering on, and I know he's trying to. Here is an example where I think he could have done a little better job on that, and I was hoping that the Treasurer would in fact see to it that this would get accomplished.

Madam Speaker, one of the great responsibilities that we on the opposition side have is to be ever vigilant of what the government's activities are and to be ever pressing in our questions on accountability and to be ever pressing on questions that request information of a broader range than is available in the public to the time of the question. Here we have a very harmless question for an analysis. That's all this is. We're just saying: after the government does what it is required to do under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees manual, after they've met that requirement and done the analysis, we're simply asking them to provide us with that. I'll tell you what. I would even accept a synopsis, or a précis, if you will, of the analysis that is compiled, if that would be the will and the wish of the government.

4:20

I don't believe that there's a downside for the current government to provide information about deals that it had nothing to do with. In fact, I think that it is something that the government has a responsibility to provide in order to allow taxpayers to better understand what went on and perhaps at the same time give us some hint as to what the current status is and whether or not there's a chance that we will have to as a province backstop some of these loans and exercise the guarantees that are being talked about.

There is tremendous pressure on all aspects of government right now for financial accountability, for financial prudence, and in this instance people are even looking for areas where some moneys might possibly be saved in addition to what's already been saved. In other areas taxpayers are asking us to try and recoup additional moneys and certainly not to get into any more of these deals. The government, to its credit, is not doing that.

So I am disappointed to note that there will not be, or at least not until I have spoken, any concurrence with this motion. Perhaps there will be a change of heart, and they will allow us to have a look at these key areas. We're only asking for a few of the examples here: the Kananaskis group, the Centre for Frontier Engineering Research, Pocaterra, the North Saskatchewan River Boat, and Canadian Airlines. I would like to know if in fact the Treasurer and/or Treasury officials have received some form of communication from those companies indicating specifically that the analysis of the financial statements cannot be released in any form. Again I stress the word "analysis."

Nonetheless, that having been said, I will try and encourage all members at this stage to vote in favour of the motion, and I take my seat.

[Motion lost]

Loans and Loan Guarantees

M86. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all annual and interim financial statement analyses prepared by the ministry of Treasury as set out under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees procedures manual for the period January 1, 1996, to January 26, 1998, underlying the monitoring of loans provided to Pratt & Whitney Canada Inc., Centennial Food Corp., and Ridley Grain Ltd.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Similar to the motion just before with respect to guarantees, this one deals with loans specifically.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer I'm afraid we're going to have to reject Motion for a Return 86, again for the same reasons: the sensitivity of the third-party information, the commerciality of financial statements being released. This motion does call for not only the annual but also interim financial statements and analyses prepared on these companies. Again I can refer to *Erskine May*, to *Beauchesne*, and the freedom of information act.

I would suggest that the hon. member visit with the Treasurer at a later date to look at some other means of acquiring the information he's looking at. But we unfortunately have to reject this motion and for all the same reasons we gave before.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. For all the same reasons as before, I'm very disappointed that we can't get this information. So I'll do a repeat performance, because sometimes if you repeat, repeat, repeat, it sinks through once in a while. What's sad is that I guess we're going to have to hire a gumshoe to find out what really happened here, you know.

MS OLSEN: A gumshoe detective?

MRS. SOETAERT: A gumshoe detective, yeah.

You know, the minister says that she can't under freedom of information. Now, I think that was well explained by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo. The point is that under that act a minister may or may not, and the other issue is: if the party consents. Did the Treasurer even go to Pratt & Whitney? Did he even go to Centennial Food or Ridley Grain? Did he even go and ask if he could make this information available? I bet he didn't.

You know what? If you're a company and you borrow money from the government, you should be willing to be open, accountable on where the money is, what you're paying back and at what point in time, if you're paying back and at what point in time. If you buy a ticket to the leader's dinner, you should be able to show all that. So I'm just saying, Madam Speaker, that those are things that I don't think people would mind. But you have to be asked sometimes for that information. I guess I ask: did the Treasurer even ask those companies if he could give out this information? I'll bet you he didn't. If he did and they said no, well, then he might have a bit of an argument there. But we never hear that in an explanation. It's just like: "Oh, let's see; what information does the opposition want today? Oh, we don't want them to find out about that. Let's just say no. Say it very politely. Say something about FOIP, and then they'll all be happy."

DR. MASSEY: You even sound like the Treasurer.

MRS. SOETAERT: Oh, dear. I don't want to be sounding like the Treasurer. No, no, no.

But that is, I bet you, how they discuss how they're going to answer these questions and get them off the Order Paper and hope they don't go on forever. They'd just better be prepared to listen to those opposition members forever, because it's our job to make them accountable. It's our job to find out where the money went. They're all very open about how much they're not spending on education and health care. I think I said that this afternoon too.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Jobs, jobs, jobs.

MRS. SOETAERT: And jobs, jobs, jobs.

They just won't tell us where the money's going. Who is monitoring it? That should give some backbenchers a little sense of unease. Do you realize that maybe it's not even being monitored? Do you ask those kinds of questions? I'm wondering if the backbenchers ever ask those kinds of questions or whether they just say: I guess I'll bring in the computer and look on the Internet this afternoon, because I don't want to hear the answers to some of these questions. I don't know.

MRS. McCLELLAN: The only way you'll find out is to join our caucus.

MRS. SOETAERT: Number one, I don't want to, and number two, I don't think you guys want me.

MRS. McCLELLAN: You've got that right.

MRS. SOETAERT: There are some things we agree upon in this House. I'm a Liberal, and I want to know some answers.

DR. MASSEY: Are you going to address that idea with the rest of your caucus?

MRS. SOETAERT: Though there might be some over here who might willingly send me. I doubt it though.

MS OLSEN: No.

MRS. SOETAERT: No, they wouldn't send me. That's totally off topic, though, so let's go back to this question.

I guess we were elected, hired by the people of Alberta to keep this government accountable, to find out . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Hired?

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah, we get a paycheque, not nearly as much as other members who have cars and extra portfolios and standing policy chairs and those kinds of things, but we do get paid for this job.

So I just want to say that it's our job to ask questions about this, but it is the government's job to answer them, and they failed in this once again. That disappoints me. Maybe in four years from now when we're government, we'll disclose all this and find out the answers. Oh, I hope no one goes to jail over some of these answers. That would be terrible. I think that while they have the immunity of the Legislature, some should come forward and give some information.

Madam Speaker, I've made the point on the previous question. So I am repeating it just as passionately and with as much interest. I want to know where the money went. I want to know who's monitoring it or if it is being monitored. You know what? As a taxpayer and a person who speaks about lowering tuition caps and the value of the dollar in the classroom, for smaller classrooms, I want to know where this money's going. I want to know who's watching it. I'm always blamed over there: oh, yeah, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, you would spend money on education. Darn right, but I'd also be tracking this money, and I wouldn't be giving out loan guarantees. I'd know where it was going and who was spending it and who was keeping track of it. That's not happening. If it is happening, you're not sharing it with the public, whose money it is.

So I'm most disappointed, Madam Speaker, that the Treasurer can't find this information to share.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll just make a few very brief comments with respect to Motion for a Return 86. I'm going to reiterate what has already been said: I, too, am very disappointed that we can't seem to have any information with respect to this motion. It has been brought forward by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek with the intent to have some sense of accountability for the taxpayers in the province of Alberta.

Also, a question that needs to be addressed. The taxpayers of Alberta want to know: what is the effectiveness of the monitoring procedures for the \$162 million in loans outstanding as of March 31, 1998? I think that just that number, the \$162 million – I mean, that's in loans that are outstanding. I think, Madam Speaker, that there has to be some accountability here. There have to be some answers. When I go back to my constituency, a constituent can phone up and say: "What effective monitoring system is in place? How is this government accountable? What are the procedures? Is it being monitored?"

Madam Speaker, if we're going to keep asking the questions and the hon. minister stands up and we don't ever get an answer – they cite some section of whatever and say: because of confidentiality and because of this and because of that. This is taxpayers' money we're talking about. We're not asking because we want to be snoopy or nosy. We want to know because we are expected to know. That's our job. We can't do our job and fulfill our mandate if we're not going to ask questions and, hopefully, receive some answers.

With those few comments, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat at this time.

4:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to conclude debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My colleagues have done such a good job that I don't have much more to add. But I would like to just officially again express some disappointment with respect to this particular rejection. What we're asking about here is in fact more a question about policy than anything and looking for some, I guess, indication of how it is that the government does its monitoring of these various loans. Again, they are – let's call them sins of the past – nothing that should unnecessarily tar the current government in any way, so I

don't see what the downside would be to government.

I do respect the confidentiality and privacy disclosure aspect arguments that have been advanced, but I would counter those arguments by saying that surely when individuals or corporations receive public moneys from the public trough, there is an expectation that they will have to be publicly accountable for those same moneys. Under what other conditions would they have received them? Unless we see all the individual agreements, unless we see what the monitoring practices are, unless we see that kind of proof, it's very difficult for taxpayers to swallow that pill of confidentiality.

I still get asked frequently about the various loans that are out there. The loan guarantees that are still out there are also a source of questions. People want to know a few basic things. One, how many more of these loans or loan guarantees are out there? Two, how much are they individually worth? Three, what's the interest that's accruing on them? Four, when can we expect to get how much money back? There's a great fear out there in certain sectors that there just may be another NovAtel or something of that magnitude out there that nobody is aware of. The question comes down to who is watching the gate? I have to always say: well, certainly the government is trying to. [interjection] The Minister of Energy tells me he is. I'm happy to see that, and I'm sure a number of people are. But the fact is that people are still asking those questions: how are they being monitored and what's the rate of return and what is the success/failure ratio in terms of the collection on those moneys?

Months ago, perhaps a year ago now, I had first said that I think the province should mount some sort of a debt posse who would have the ability to track these loans and these loan guarantees, hunt them down, and try and maximize the return to taxpayers.

So I express some disappointment and would encourage all members to please vote in support of Motion 86.

[Motion lost]

Treasury Branches

M87. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all approved three- to five-year strategic plans prepared by or on behalf of the Alberta Treasury Branches between January 1, 1993, and January 26, 1998.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Yes. Madam Speaker, on behalf again of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer I'd like to propose an amendment to Motion for a Return 87. That amendment would be by adding the words "that are publicly available" after the words "strategic plans." Therefore Motion for a Return 87 as amended would read:

. . . that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all approved three- to five-year strategic plans that are publicly available prepared by or on behalf of the Alberta Treasury Branches between January 1, 1993, and January 26, 1998.

I understand that this motion for amendment has been reviewed by the hon. member opposite and that he is in favour of the amendment to the original motion.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Yes, the amendment is acceptable, and I am happy for it. I just wanted to make a couple of brief comments now with respect to the motion as amended to conclude debate, if I might.

I want to just point out that what we're really talking about here is, again, of a nonthreatening nature. We're simply talking about strategic plans that would shed some light on where it is that the new group at the Alberta Treasury Branches wishes to take the community banking industry in this province. I have said many times and I'll say again that I support this new group in its endeavours to clean up their balance sheet and to move forward with many of the very positive new initiatives that they have already brought about.

I would like to just stress, too, that many of the points that the Alberta Liberal opposition has raised over the years have been included within some of those new changes and the new recommendations, including things like the annual shareholders' meeting, some of the new services and capabilities that they have, what are called ancillary services, which have leveled the playing field for banks throughout the province. There are new lending practices. There are new cost-control measures. There are new forms of monitoring. I think the left hand and the right hand truly do know what they're doing, and they have a vote of confidence from me in that respect.

So I am happy that we're going to be receiving some information that will provide some insight into what their plans are as we head into the next three to five years. I note with some interest that the bottom line is improving for Treasury Branches, and I wish them well with respect to the next few years in that regard.

So with that, I will thank the minister – I think she said she was speaking on behalf of the Treasurer – and look forward to receiving the information requested.

[Motion as amended carried]

Treasury Consulting Services

M88. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the \$1.257 million in expenditures contained under vote 3.1.4, project management/transition, Treasury Department, 1995-96 public accounts, volume 2, page 113, providing a breakdown of expenditures on consulting services, an identification of each fee-for-service contractor, and the nature of the project engaged in by fee-for-service contractors.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, on behalf of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer I'd like to move an amendment to Motion for a Return 88. That amendment would be by striking out "\$1.257 million" and substituting "\$1.196 million." Therefore, the motion as amended would read:

. . . that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the \$1.196 million in expenditures contained under vote 3.1.4, project management/transition, Treasury Department, 1995-96 public accounts, volume 2, page 113, providing a breakdown of expenditures on consulting services, an identification of each fee-for-service contractor, and the nature of the project engaged in by fee-for-service contractors.

I understand again, Madam Speaker, that the hon. member opposite is in favour of the amendment as presented.

[Motion on amendment carried]

4:40

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to conclude debate on the amended motion.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am happy to accept the amendment, which minorly alters the original motion. We'll see what the significance of that is at some point, but I don't see it being any problem. So I'm happy to accept it at this stage.

I would like to simply in just a minute or so advise all members that there is a large number of individuals and firms who comprise what are called consultants, that category called consultants to government on a fee-for-service basis or some other arrangement. In particular, some of the ones that I was noting with interest, that I'll look forward to receiving more information on: Longwoods International for research advisory services group. I think it's the services that were provided to the Alberta fiscal issues research division at a charge of about \$304,400. Then there's \$40,427 to Boothe consultants for economic and fiscal research; a further \$27,488 to W.J. Page & Associates for assistance with organizing some restructuring; \$33,630 paid to Coopers & Lybrand to define a project management structure to address provincial fiscal issues; also, a further \$7,184 for a presentation by Sir Roger Douglas on New Zealand's public-sector reforms and the purchase of the book *Unfinished Business*; finally, \$11,832 for a presentation by Ernst & Young on New Zealand's public-sector budgetary reform.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Just in case I wasn't too clear on that first one with regard to Longwoods International, I would just clarify that in 1993-94, \$304,400 was paid to Longwoods International for the performance of some research advisory services. That's what I'm hoping will be included with the other points referred to.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and thank the hon. Treasurer through the hon. Minister of Economic Development for accepting the motion and for presenting an amendment that they find palatable.

[Motion as amended carried]

Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Inc.

M89. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all memoranda of understanding, MOUs, and amended schedules of MOUs between the government and the Al-Pac joint venture and the joint venture partners for the period January 1, 1989, to January 26, 1998, setting out the obligations and commitments of the government and the joint venture/joint venture partners to construct and operate a kraft pulp mill and paper mill.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make some

comments on behalf of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer. The government tries very hard to provide the information that all hon. members ask for, but there are some conditions that preclude us from providing information, that are in fact there to protect Albertans. We go to great lengths to give as much information – and in fact, I think the hon. members opposite would have to admit that there have never been as many accepted motions and written questions before in the history of this province, dealing with them as quickly as we do, because we are trying to give that information. Sometimes, though, we are precluded by our own laws from doing that.

Again, on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I would like to submit an amendment to this Motion for a Return 89. That amendment would be by striking out “copies of all” and substituting “summaries of.” Therefore, the motion as amended would read:

. . . that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing summaries of memoranda of understanding, MOUs, and amended schedules of MOUs between the government and the Al-Pac joint venture and the joint venture partners for the period January 1, 1989, to January 26, 1998, setting out the obligations and commitments of the government and the joint venture/joint venture partners to construct and operate a kraft pulp mill and paper mill.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I understand that this amendment has been reviewed by the member opposite, and he is in agreement with the amendment to Motion for a Return 89.

Once again I really want to stress that I think it's highly unfair for members opposite to say there has not been a lot of effort on the part of this government to provide information to not only the members opposite but to Albertans on what some of these commitments are. I think that by making amendments to those motions – in the past they would have been outright rejections – we work very closely with the members opposite to provide this information.

So once again, on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I would move the amendment to Motion for a Return 89.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to conclude the debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes. I rise to close debate on Motion 89 as amended. We will accept the amendment, as the hon. minister has indicated, with concurrence and look forward to receiving that information.

I just want to take a minute, if I might, Mr. Speaker, to simply highlight that on behalf of Alberta taxpayers we're still looking to find out more about the specific arrangements that have been made by the government between itself and the joint venture partners with respect to the construction of this pulp mill project. Let's be clear. We understand that there has been some economic benefit to that project, that there are a number of individuals in the area who have been employed through this project and continue to be employed, and we're respectful of what the intention of the original arrangement was both with respect to the moneys that went into that area and with respect to the outcomes that were anticipated.

It's very unfortunate that the low level of pulp prices around the world right now, not just here in our own neck of the woods, is such that there is no greater profitability possible, at least not in the short term, from that particular project and that taxpayers will

be suffering the loss, which everybody is painfully and abundantly aware of. It does rank as one of the top seven losses of the province. Again, I'm not faulting the current people with getting into that deal. I have taken some shots at the current people with respect to how they got out of the deal but will wait until the deal is completed in a couple, three, or four more weeks, and we'll see if that was indeed the best deal possible or not.

In the meantime, we look forward to the additional information that has been promised and just take this opportunity to also stress that we are still hoping that the Auditor General at the request of the Premier, in which he is acting on a request from me, that together we will be able to still see a special duty review of the entire Al-Pac thing at some point. In the meantime, copies or summaries of whatever is available will be appreciated, and we look forward to receiving those.

[Motion as amended carried]

4:50 Treasury Branches

M90. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all forensic audit reports prepared by or on behalf of the Alberta Treasury Branches for the period January 1, 1995, to January 26, 1998, relating to allegations of inappropriate business practices at the Alberta Treasury Branches.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, on behalf of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer I am going to reject this motion for a return. I think the hon. member opposite will know why, because he's asked for the disclosure of forensic audit reports, that would clearly put the Alberta Treasury Branches at an unfair commercial and financial disadvantage with respect to other banking institutions. He knows the citations. We've gone through this several times in this session as it pertains to Alberta Treasury Branches. Also, I think the information may relate to Alberta Treasury Branches customers, whose affairs must be kept confidential, and it is inappropriate to release the results of any of these internal investigations.

We go through this each time, Mr. Speaker, and therefore we must reject this motion for a return.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to conclude the debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand what the hon. minister is speaking about. I just want to make it clear that the intention here is with respect to those particular entities that the Auditor General or whoever is doing the audit on his behalf has identified as having a problem with regard to certain business practices. So it's restricted, Madam Minister, insofar as it's not a forensic audit of the entire operation. We're talking about forensic audit reports related to the allegations of inappropriate business practices. I'm inferring from that that we're looking at the specific areas where they would have occurred. So I don't think that that infers that all entities were somehow tainted. It's only those that required the Auditor General to make that observation that I was interested in. Just to be clear.

I know that there are frequently, Mr. Speaker, certain deficien-

cies that arise with respect to the procedures and practices that various banking entities unfortunately experience. It's all done by human beings, after all, and from time to time people do have those kinds of slipups, particularly when it comes to some of the larger commercial loans, that tend to be very complicated in their nature and as a result contribute to some poor performance outcomes with respect to the broader portfolios under which they fall. So when the Auditor General himself flags the fact that he is undertaking an investigation, when the Auditor General tells us that there are allegations of inappropriate business practices, and when the Auditor General tells us that there are those kinds of serious scenarios, then obviously we have to pay attention.

Our job as the opposition is to ask questions, and certainly the government can accept them or reject them. I'm disappointed that this one is being rejected, because I have great respect for the Auditor General's office. I meet with the Auditor General and his staff in this Assembly every Wednesday morning during session, and we go through public accounts. We go through public accounts of all the departments. We ask a lot of questions. I make a habit of involving the Auditor General because I respect deeply what he says as an independent source. We should be using him more as not just a source but also a resource. He's a very intelligent man with a very good view and a very good handle on what the role of the Auditor General in this province is all about. When he speaks to me, it's just like that commercial for E.F. Hutton: I listen. I immediately listen. I have great respect for that.

However, I will accept the points that have been raised by the hon. minister, and having expressed the disappointment, I will take my seat and try again another time to uncover the information requested.

[Motion lost]

Treasury Branches

M91. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a breakdown of the \$408.171 million in guarantees by borrower provided by the Alberta Treasury Branches deposits fund as of March 31, 1997, as contained in the 1996-97 public accounts, volume 3, note 14, page 240.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. BLACK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, on behalf of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer I must reject Motion for a Return 91. You know, it's like eventually you can get through to the opposition that we are not able to provide this information on Alberta Treasury Branches on an individual basis. I don't know how plain you can make it. I've done enough of these motions for returns this session, and each time we come to this we say: look; we can't give you that information. I wish he would come and talk to us and tell us what he's looking for, and maybe we can help him along rather than putting these things continually on the Order Paper. Each time we have to stand up and say that we cannot provide that information. We would be in violation of our own freedom of information laws, our own parliamentary authorities to disclose that individual information. Again we have to reject it.

So I know he'll be disappointed, but I can't help that. I wish he'd come into our office and tell us what he's looking for, what

type of information he wants, and maybe we can help him that way. But we must reject this motion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek to conclude debate.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed. I've been cut to the quick.

Here are the facts. Alberta Treasury Branches, we know, are an extremely vital part of the operations of this province. No question. If it hadn't been for the Treasury Branches, I don't think a lot of farmers and, in turn, a lot of Albertans and, in turn, the Alberta economy would ever have pulled through like it did since 1936 or '38. That's a fact. Okay? Number two, we as taxpayers backstop the operations of that particular entity. That's fact number two. Fact number three, if I'm backstopping something and you are and three million other Albertans out there are, don't we have a right to at least some information as to what the heck is going on? The fact is that yes, we do.

I do understand the question that has been posed here by the hon. minister. [interjection] The hon. Minister of Energy has raised a couple of additional points, but those are the facts: we do backstop that operation. What does that mean? Since they're not clear on this, I will explain what this means. That means that if something goes bad, you and I as taxpayers have to make good on it. That's a simple explanation. Now, anybody who knows anything about finance and banking would understand that. It's a very simple concept. You backstop it; we are the ultimate guarantee. That's what we are legally with respect to the way the corporation and the acts surrounding that corporation are worded.

Now, that having been said and that having been straightened out, I appreciate the invitation to come and talk, and I may well take that up. I have listened a number of times now to the explanations given in this House by the hon. Provincial Treasurer and/or any of his counterparts on his behalf, and I understand what they're saying about the disclosure of confidential information. I respect that. I've been in business virtually all of my life, and I understand that.

5:00

What is not clear and what is not understood is whether or not there is some caveat within all of those agreements that prevents the public from knowing some of the information. If that in fact is in those agreements, show that to me. Show that to me in the agreement that was signed by the province or its underwriter. Show it to me in the agreement that was signed by the people borrowing the money or accepting the guarantee or whatever the financial commitment was. Show me where it says in the agreement that the public has no right to know this information. If you show that to me, I won't ask this question again. I won't ask this question again if that's in the agreement that was signed, and that's why I'm going to take up the minister on her invitation, because I know she's speaking on behalf of the Treasurer.

The point here is that if there is information like that available, then, gee, bring it in here, show it to me, and let's get on with the rest of the business. I have no problem with that. But until that happens, I have no other way of acting on all the requests that I get from Albertans. I don't just get requests in this portfolio from my own nook and cranny of Edmonton-Mill Creek. I enjoy those questions when they come from my own constituents, and they get responded to first. But I get questions from right across the province. I get questions from Vancouver. I get questions from Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, and New York, people who are

watching this province because it is a great province. [interjections] I do. I get questions from at least those, and if I thought hard, I'd think of a couple of others. There is no restriction on people who are looking for information. [interjections]

So when I ask these questions, I appreciate the fact that the members are taking me seriously.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Some hon. members would be able to observe that the physiognomy of the chair has changed in the last day, and most of you would understand also that the hearing ability of the present chair is not what it could be or what the previous chair's is. He's having difficulty hearing anything except a cacophony of sound. We only have one member speaking, yet I can hear quite clearly a number of others who for the moment will remain unnamed. But the only one that has been recognized by the chair and should be talking at this time, hon. members, is the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Debate Continued

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just continue on for a couple of brief moments, if I might.

I think there is a misconception on the part of certain government members that the reason some of these questions are being asked is other than for the face value of the knowledge requested. There's nothing more to it. We simply are asking these questions, some of which we have presented on our own and others of which Albertans or other entities have asked us to present on their behalf, and we've simply crafted it into accepted parliamentary form. So let's have that misconception continue no longer. I will go over and talk with the Treasurer and the minister on these couple of points.

The final thing I want to say is that this specific motion, which is Motion 91, just requests an explanation by using the term "breakdown" by borrower of why it is that suddenly we see an increase and the guarantees go up by \$351 million. That's just a straightforward question. What necessitated that? That's what the nature of this question is.

The subtext of that question is: was it all one single business loan, an additional business loan, or was it a large number of them? Was it just one here in Edmonton? Was it across the province? What would be wrong with taxpayers finding out that information if we are in fact the people backstopping it?

You see, having done a little bit of additional homework – this may be purely by coincidence, but that increase of \$350 million is exactly the same amount that we think – at least I do – coincides with the refinancing package relative to West Edmonton Mall. Now, I'm very proud of West Edmonton Mall. I'm very proud of that. Having traveled to various points of the world, as many members here have, there are two things that people remembered immediately about Edmonton at the time I was doing the traveling: one of them was Wayne Gretzky and the other was West Edmonton Mall. [interjection] Now, pretty soon there's going to be a third one called the Alberta Liberal Party. I just said that for her.

However, the fact is that if there is a guarantee there that we're supporting, then let us know. That shouldn't be any big deal. Again, as I say, I support West Edmonton Mall. In fact, when I was chairman and producer of the Great Canadian awards, I helped present an award to them, the Great Canadian award. Some of the ministers who are in this House today were in that

audience, and they know how positive and bullish I am on Edmonton and on West Edmonton Mall or the Oilers or whom-ever, all the other fine businesses that make this particular city tick. I'm a very strong Albertan, a very strong Canadian, and a strong Edmontonian to boot. So I would not do anything to ever put a blemish on any of those entities that operate here.

I'm simply asking on behalf of taxpayers, the shareholders, if you will, of ATB for some additional explanation. So I am somewhat disappointed in that, and I would hope that hon. members, having heard the arguments for and against, would now see fit to vote in support of this motion, and I would ask that that question be put to the floor forthwith.

[Motion lost]

Computing Services Outsourcing

M94. Dr. Pannu moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents, studies, reports, projections, or analyses from each ministry from January 1, 1992, to the present supporting the government's conclusion that it would be to the taxpayers' advantage to provide most government computing services through outsourcing by privatization or contracting out.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. minister of public works the government rejects Motion for a Return 94. The reason for the rejection is that all documents, studies, reports, all projections, all analyses for each ministry from January 1 of '92 to the present from all of the government - what this really in essence does is cast a very, very wide net. As each ministry is responsible for making decisions based on their individual business case, this request could only be met by requiring that every ministry in government be canvassed for material to satisfy this particular motion. The government's decision to reject this motion is supported by *Beauchesne* 446(2)(g), which states, "Papers of a voluminous character or which would require an inordinate cost or length of time to prepare."

I would suggest to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona that the motion could be resubmitted on a more focused basis, requesting specific information from specific departments rather than requesting everything from everybody everywhere. I would also like to add, Mr. Speaker, that while it is the responsibility of each ministry to develop informational technology plans and solutions in relation to the achievement of their business plans and objectives, Public Works, Supply and Services continues to be available to provide support and guidance to other ministries for the planning, acquisition, monitoring, and subsequent assessment when outsourcing information technology services. What I would really recommend to the hon. member is be more specific, try and narrow the parameters, and every effort would be made to achieve the request.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Part of me accepts the fact that the minister says to be a little more focused, which of course could mean that it could be amended then. I

would appreciate an amendment to it. It's Public Works; he's in charge of computers. Let's start with that one, would be a fine suggestion I would think. You're saying that it's throwing a wide net. It's because we're worried about something fishy going on.

5:10

Speaking of fishing, a prime example of this would be ISM and the privatization of fishing licences. Where were the studies for that? The reports? The projections? The analysis? You know what? I don't think it would be voluminous paper, because I don't think it was done. I don't think there was any analysis done on, for example, privatizing the computer system for fishing. I really don't think it was done. So there wouldn't be, you know, binders and boxes of documents tabled, because it wasn't done. It was just a little deal with a private little company who happens to donate to the Conservative Party.

So those are things that we are concerned about, especially when we're talking computers and privacy, the privacy of information that goes out there. We know there are problems with the registries being privatized. Our own personal information is out in the world for anybody to access. I think that is a concern for Albertans, so I think this is a reasonable motion.

If the minister didn't want to answer it, he could have amended it and given some of the information just so that we had a level of comfort that you are doing studies and you are doing some work and you are doing some homework before you privatize something and you contract out. So I'm very disappointed that this motion can't be supported.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have some concerns about the fact that this government moves into outsourcing and privatizing under the guise of it being cheaper, better for Albertans. Well, that's not necessarily true. Yes, we have to acknowledge that we are in a global environment. Yes, we have to acknowledge that it is indeed important to keep up with technology and that sometimes by doing that, we must move to an outside environment where people on their own are keeping up with what's happening in the computer industry. However, I think the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona is attempting to get reports and studies that show to the taxpayer that, indeed, the service they're going to get by privatization and outsourcing and contracts is going to be better, that the service will be better, that it's going to be cheaper by going outside than it is by keeping people employed within this government.

We know that in the Leg. Assembly Office alone the turnover rate in the information systems department has been phenomenal. I think it was 90 percent the last time the Members' Services Committee met. Part of that is because in this government the experts aren't being paid the amount of money they could get in the private sector. So they go to the private sector, and they get paid more money when they contract back to the government than they do by working here. Consequently you have a 90 percent turnover rate in many of the information systems departments.

I guess I've talked many times about the need for a framework to be set up if you're going to privatize. I talked about that with the delegated administrative authorities and what would be a reasonable framework and what we would be asking this government to determine if we were to privatize certain areas within government.

We can look at ISM. Now, nothing against ISM, IBM, or any

other company; it just happens to be one that has signed a contract now with, I think, the ministry of environment. With that particular project what's happened is that we've now limited the ability for Albertans to be able to get a fishing licence and a hunting licence. What we've said is that we're going to privatize this, we're going to go out to a certain vendor. Well, we know for sure that ISM is going to be producing the cards. What we don't know is: are they being produced in this province or are they being produced in Vancouver?

You see, we know that the British Columbia government has a contract with ISM for all of their drivers' licences, and they keep their database in B.C. ISM keeps the database in B.C. So, you know, we can't even find out from this government if the terminals that are actually at a vendor's merely are there to have the data entered, the data is fired off to a central computer database in another part of the province or another part of the country – which is great technology. I think it's great. However, people from the department of the environment are now unemployed as a result of this. Then what happens when it gets to British Columbia is that the little cards are made up. Now, ISM gets to keep, I think, about \$5 or \$6 from each card they make, and the vendor gets \$2. So that causes . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Fish and wildlife doesn't get anything.

MS OLSEN: Fish and wildlife doesn't get their share. So now we have this convoluted system that is supposed to be cheaper. Given that we have a contracted-out system and now we have a company that's very global and the product is being produced somewhere else, we don't know what the cost is to the taxpayers, the real costs. But we do know that for-profit companies are just that. They need to make money. They will have control over the cost of that licence.

The other issue for many of these particular companies is that they keep proprietary rights over the software and that once a contract expires, they take the software with them, and we have the small vendor having to pay for the particular terminals.

I have some concerns that this type of request, which really is to ask for the "studies, reports, projections, or analyses from each ministry" to support the government's move to privatization, is not something this government should be afraid to share. I think there needs to be legislative oversight. There needs to be an effective system of monitoring.

I think accountability is the number one issue. If this government wants to really be accountable, then they would produce the documentation as requested by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. I think we've seen here today a lack of willingness to share. Sharing is very important. Information is important.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just very, very briefly speak to Motion for a Return 94. I think this is clearly a very, very simple request that there should be some documents and some sense of a study, an analysis done to let taxpayers know if there is an advantage, in terms of spending their money, to using outsourcing by private enterprise for the contracting out of computer services. It would not take much effort on behalf of the government to supply the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona with that information. There was a discussion by the minister

saying that it would encompass a lot of work and a lot of time. I think if they are taking on that initiative – and they've been doing it since 1992 – obviously they're doing it because they have some analysis done and all the legwork is in place. Taxpayers have a right to know if there is an advantage in terms of money spent.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, I've been sitting here all afternoon listening to the requests from opposition members, and on and on we go. It seems to be no to this, no to that. Different ministers are not acknowledging the requests made for any accountability, whether it be from the Treasury Department – now the minister of transportation replied with the favourite word "no." There just doesn't seem to be any sense of sharing information that we have to be accountable for.

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

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to conclude debate on this item.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my colleagues who have spoken to this motion. I appreciate their very thoughtful, considered comments and observations, and I think what they have said reflects the general concerns of Albertans. The fact that so many of them have already spoken on the motion also shows that the questions I'm asking are not the result of some eccentric interests that I have, that these are in fact real questions, important questions. These are vital issues that the questions speak to.

This is the second time my request has been turned down, so this time I have to start by saying that I'm not surprised that my request has been turned down. I'm obviously disappointed, and my constituents will be disappointed to hear that I have been turned down on this.

The request is quite simple, straightforward. The minister speaking on behalf of the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services of course has argued that it's too much information that's being asked for; there'll be reams and reams and reams of paper they'll have to produce in order to satisfy my questions. I think that's not a terribly persuasive kind of argument. While he said on the one hand that it is in fact the case that lots of paper will be have to be brought in here to satisfy my questions, on the other hand he says that it is indeed the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services which addresses many of these needs for all of the departments. I would have thought that the department that is responsible for providing these services, making these services available to all different departments of the government, would keep some sort of record of the kinds of facts I'm seeking. If no one in the government is doing this, then obviously the government is running around in the dark.

It's a government that claims to have some business smarts. It's a government that has undertaken a very, very wide-ranging restructuring of the government. It claims it has cut down the size of the government. It has done all of this, of course, not for some perverse reason, to fire people or to do certain things, but only because they were trying to save taxpayers their money. The rationale for restructuring, more than anything else, was cost cutting. If there's no one to monitor the costs of restructuring, the costs that had to be paid out year after year after year through outsourcing and privatization because of restructuring and subsequent to restructuring, then how do we know, how do Albertans know that the restructuring in fact has produced the

expected results? The government doesn't seem to know where it's going. This is all I can conclude from what I hear in response to my very straightforward, simple, but important motion for a return.

Mr. Speaker, if the government is not doing this, if the government is not in a position to provide this information when asked by members of this House, then it's not doing its homework, which it ought to be doing. It's been elected, put in this position to look after our public treasury and to spend every dollar that we collect in revenues in a responsible way and in fact demonstrate that it is being spent in a responsible way. That's why I asked this question in the first place.

Now, the hon. minister keeps telling me I should be more specific. How much more specific can I get? I want this information, and the minister could have said very nicely: "Well, look. It will take some time. We'll give you this information today. Albertans deserve to know this. It's a good question. I appreciate your asking the question, but we can only provide this much information at this point in time. But certainly if you give us time, we'll be more than happy; in fact, we'll see this as our obligation to provide this information."

But the minister is being technical. The minister is being legalistic. The minister is simply playing around with words rather than addressing the spirit and the letter of my motion, which asks to show us the results in terms of your costs that you're incurring by privatizing the services related to government computing services. The answer of course from the government, given by my hon. friend on the opposite side, is that we are too broad and we're asking for too much. Well, please give us what you have. Please give us what you have. If you don't give us what you already have, how can we expect you to give us any more than what you have?

So the answer is not very persuasive, Mr. Minister and Mr. Speaker. I'm really disappointed. Not surprised, because there's a certain pattern that's emerging during this session, and that is in

fact to stonewall, to deny the public the information that it deserves to have with respect to the performance of this government.

MR. DICKSON: Richard Nixon would be proud.

DR. PANNU: The hon. Member from Calgary-Buffalo, of course, says that Richard Nixon would be proud of this stonewalling, successful stonewalling of the information and the attempt to keep the information from the citizens and their representatives, who are duly elected and here to have the right to have that information and take it back to their constituents.

Millions of dollars are being spent to outsource; absolutely millions and millions of dollars are being spent on outsourcing for these services. We know that when you outsource, you pay both for the overhead and for profits and all of that, and it's not difficult to speculate that the costs would be rather high. We have to then say: "We'll look at the costs. We've run this experiment for four years. Now it's time to take a look at it. If it doesn't work, let's see an alternative way. It is our obligation to spend taxpayers' money in the most responsible way and always allow public scrutiny of the manner in which we spend that money and show the results. If we can't show the results, then there is something wrong either about our will to show the results or our ability to show the results." Either way, it is an unacceptable situation for a government to be in.

Mr. Speaker, it's a disappointment that the government would continue to privatize more, I guess, driven by the ideology that is propounded very eloquently by the Minister of Energy, which seems to be accepted without question, uncritically by . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is now 5:30. According to Standing Order 4, the House is adjourned until 8 p.m.

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