

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Wednesday, April 29, 1998 1:30 p.m.
Date: 98/04/29
 [The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.
 Heavenly Father, guide our thoughts, words, and deeds to be worthy of the trust our constituents have placed in us to serve Thee better through our service to our province of Alberta and to its people.
 Amen.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly His Excellency Robert M. Sabga, high commissioner for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. His Excellency is accompanied by Mr. Steven Kangal, deputy high commissioner. I would like to take this opportunity to officially welcome High Commissioner Sabga to Alberta and to wish him a very enjoyable and productive stay in our province. Alberta and Trinidad and Tobago share similar interests and strengths in the oil and gas sector. We hope this visit will be of mutual benefit to both regions. I had an opportunity earlier this morning to discuss many areas of mutual interest with the high commissioner and his party. I would ask that the high commissioner and his party please rise in the gallery and receive the recognition and warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce petitions signed by Albertans from a variety of constituencies supporting the holding of "Senate elections during the province-wide municipal elections in October 1998."

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 146 Albertans urging the government to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and commit never to use the Notwithstanding Clause . . . to override fundamental human rights of Albertans.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm presenting today a petition identical in nature to many that I have presented now on the subject of quality child care. Today's petition is signed by 46, which I believe brings the total now to well over 7,000 names.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two requests: the first that the petition I presented yesterday be read back, and the second with your approval and through you to the Clerk of the House from members of the Assembly, a happy birthday.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned citizens of Alberta, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to the following: that Albertans deserve an accountable Senate; therefore, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to hold Senate elections during the province-wide municipal elections in October 1998.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you. There are some four petitions I think I presented, which I'd now ask be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta not to pass Bill 37, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 1998.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta not to pass Bill 37, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 1998.

We the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and commit never to use the Notwithstanding Clause, or any other means, to override the fundamental human rights of Albertans.

We, the undersigned, members of the medical profession and our patients, being residents of the Province of Alberta and of the age of majority, hereby Petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to refrain from bringing forth to the Legislature for debate and vote thereon a bill that was presented in the last session of the Legislature at its last sitting as Bill 29, The Medical Professions Amendment Act of 1997.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I recently presented asking that the funding for post-secondary education be increased now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

Whereas we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, believe that education makes sense and that an investment in post-secondary education is an investment in Alberta's future.

Therefore we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to support the continued provision of an affordable, high quality post-secondary education system.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition presented on Tuesday, April 28, now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to examine and amend the Workers Compensation Board Act to provide appropriate benefits to those Albertans whose spouses died in work-related accidents, and who subsequently lost their benefits due to remarriage.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask that the petitions I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned citizens of Alberta, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to the following: that Albertans deserve an accountable Senate; therefore, we, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to hold Senate elections during the province-wide municipal elections in October 1998.

We, the undersigned, members of the medical profession and our patients, being residents of the Province of Alberta and of the age of majority, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to refrain from bringing forth to the Legislature for debate and vote thereon a bill that was presented in the last session of the Legislature at its last sitting as Bill 29, The Medical Professions Amendment Act of 1997.

head: **Notices of Motions**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

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

Be it resolved that debate on third reading of Bill 40, Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 1998, shall not be further adjourned.

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to give oral notice of Bill 47, which is Protection from Secondhand Smoke in Public Buildings Amendment Act, 1998, which I will introduce tomorrow.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 237

Endangered Species and Habitats Protection Act

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce Bill 237, the Endangered Species and Habitats Protection Act.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, my first ever, is dedicated to ensure that sufficient habitats are set aside to protect and regenerate endangered animals and plants. The bill establishes a council consisting of scientists, native elders, and members of the public at large to designate the endangered species and recommend measures for their conservation, recovery, and reintroduction. Last, the council will work closely with landowners, environmentalists, and other interested groups and seek input.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It's a brief introduction that's required, hon. member.

[Leave granted; Bill 237 read a first time]

1:40 **Statement by the Speaker**
Private Members' Public Bills

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair would like to make a brief

comment concerning the introduction of Bill 237 by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. As all members are aware, positions for private members' public bills are determined by a draw. In accordance with the July 15, 1997, draw, Bills 201 to 230 were drafted and introduced in order, with Bill 231 being introduced yesterday. Drafting of bills after Bill 230 could not occur until after the first 30 bills were introduced.

This is not the first time that a private member's public bill has been introduced out of order since the 1993 amendments to the Standing Orders have taken effect. The chair would refer members to the introduction of Bill 232 on October 30, 1995. Introduction of a private member's public bill does not, however, move it ahead of other bills.

The chair would like to reiterate the Speaker's comments from June 16, 1997, in this regard when he said:

Even if a member introduced his or her Bill out of order, it would not affect the order in which it was considered . . . To do otherwise would be inconsistent with the purpose and rationale of the draw, which in the Chair's view works on a fair and equitable basis for all members.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, two tablings today. Today I'd like to table a summary of government public consultations in Alberta over the past year. In 1997 over 26,000 Albertans were involved in shaping the future of this province by attending public meetings and various workshops. Over 600,000 people called to give us their views, and 67,000 Albertans gave oral and written submissions at public meetings. Listening to Albertans continues to be a priority for this government.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling today. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly five copies of the final report on Alberta's participation in the 1998 Team Canada mission to Latin America. This year's Team Alberta included 52 representatives from the province's business and education sectors and was the largest Alberta delegation ever to participate in a Team Canada mission. It was truly an honour to be part of such an accomplished and dedicated team of professionals. Each and every one did Alberta proud as an ambassador for the province, and I want to thank them on behalf of all Albertans for a job well done.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table today copies of four amendments which I will be proposing to the Senatorial Selection Amendment Act, 1998, Bill 40. The first of these four amendments would . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Table, if you will, your amendments, but we don't need to go into the debate or the beginning of the debate. Very brief.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you. I will. Well, Mr. Speaker, we're allowed to describe our bills briefly. I'm just going to describe this very briefly.

The first amendment would prohibit . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We'll take that under advisement for future reference as to whether or not you can explain at any length your amendments in a tabling process. Right now we'll take them as being tabled. So if you'll complete the tabling without all of the explanations.

MR. MITCHELL: Mr. Speaker, this amendment is to prohibit

remuneration of senatorial nominations. My second amendment would limit the terms of senatorial nominees to five years. My third amendment would require that senatorial nominees report annually to this Legislative Assembly, and my fourth amendment would require that senatorial nominees meet the constitutional provisions laid out for senators in the Constitution of this . . .

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

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to table the 1997 annual report for the office of the Farmers' Advocate of Alberta.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first is a letter to the Premier from Sturgeon county regarding highway 794 and what they'd like to see done, an open letter from Cliff Burns describing 794, a letter from Solange Price indicating her concerns about 794, and another one from T. Wohlgenuth on the same issue, 794.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of separate tablings, and I'll proceed with them as quickly as I can. The first is correspondence from myself to Ron Duhamel, who is the secretary of state for science and technology, regarding the future of the Alberta science and technology hot line. Accompanying that are copies of correspondence to the same federal minister from the director of that hot line, Dr. Michael Caley.

The second set of correspondence is correspondence from myself to the provincial minister of science, research, and information technology regarding the future of the hot line and correspondence from Dr. Michael Caley on the same matter pointing out the importance of the science hot line as part of the province's science and technology strategy.

Also, I have correspondence from myself to the Minister of Community Development pointing out that the controversy surrounding the AADAC report is about the government's responsibility not about Harold Wynne or Brian Kearns.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, correspondence from a constituent regarding Bill 37 and urging the government to withdraw Bill 37.

Thank you.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I table four copies of the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table an information bulletin on Alberta Library Week 1998, which is from May 3 to May 9. This designated week was established in 1997 to raise awareness of library services and promote lifelong learning.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to

introduce two grade 6 classes from Fort Saskatchewan elementary school, students whom I'm sure follow the instructions of their teacher better than we have seen exhibited in this Assembly today. They're accompanied by their teachers, Mr. Stetzenko and Ms Miles, and also parents and helpers Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Bibbey, Mr. Cockburn, and Mr. Doig. If they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to introduce two parties to you. It's with great pleasure that I introduce to you and through you to all Members of this Legislative Assembly Mr. Thor Lerohl. Thor is a retired school principal. He is also the vice-president of the Edmonton-Gold Bar Liberal Constituency Association, and he gives me very sound advice on matters relating to health care and education. I would ask Thor to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The second party I would like to introduce to you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to all members of this Assembly is the grade 6 class from Hardisty junior high school. This grade 6 class is the Logos school program and it is an alternate Christian program that's under the umbrella of the Edmonton public school board. There are 34 visitors this afternoon from the school. They are led by Ms Shelly Juhlin, one of the teachers, and Mr. Jim Higgs and also by parent helpers Mrs. Gladys Gilker and Mrs. Jacqueline Slifka. If they would rise in the public gallery and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly, I would be grateful.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you 38 visitors from the Rosemary and Gem area who attend the Rosemary school. With them are teachers Marian Wilson and David Blumell, as well as parent helpers Wanda Doerksen, Joyce Baerg, Kristie Hall, Perry Dixon, and Kathy and Richard Gette. I would ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three gentlemen who have worked in our local constituencies. They are seated in the members' gallery. They are Reid Lillico, Mr. Al Kennedy, and Bruce Garriock. I'd ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

Gambling Prevalence Report

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. The Minister of Community Development would have us believe and have all Albertans believe that the

AADAC-commissioned gambling report has been suppressed because it is fraught with data errors. The minister would like this issue to be seen as a disagreement between two professionals. However, it would be wrong to question the professionalism or the integrity of Harold Wynne and his associates or Brian Kearns and his colleagues at AADAC. The real issues here are that someone in the government decided that this report would not be made available in time for the gaming summit and, even more importantly, that it would not be made available in time for Albertans to be informed before the fall video slot machine plebiscites are held. My first question is to the Minister of Community Development and responsible for AADAC. Who exactly – if it was you, say so – in government decided that the time line that AADAC had for the release of that report was more important than the timely release of the information and therefore made the decision to suppress the report?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no question on who's driving this agenda. I laid before this Assembly on I believe Monday or Tuesday a letter that was dated in August of '97 from Brian Kearns from AADAC to a staff member in my department outlining the process. I also tabled that day a strategic time line dated December 2 that had been updated from earlier in that year laying out clearly the steps that would be taken in producing the prevalence study report.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, the gambling summit that was held in Medicine Hat was a great success. A great success. I'm sorry – well, I'm not really sorry, but maybe it's unfortunate if it didn't produce the results that the hon. member would have liked to have seen.

Mr. Speaker, again I will remind the hon. member who is driving this agenda that this is AADAC's study. This is a prevalence study that is done as a complement to the first prevalence study that was done in '93-94 that laid out our benchmarks for information in gaming.

Now, I think the hon. member is the one that's off base here in asking AADAC, an internationally renowned treater and researcher of addictions, to jimmy their time lines to satisfy his agenda, because clearly it is his agenda. There is no conflict between the contract researcher, AADAC, and the minister or the chair of AADAC. It is all simply in his mind.

MR. SAPERS: Albertans will decide about whose agenda and whose ox is being gored, Mr. Speaker.

Given that the Minister of Community Development admitted yesterday that she has not read the report, could the minister please explain how she can continue to claim that the report is fraught with data errors if she hasn't read it?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. member could quite use his time reading *Hansard*. In the discussion when this was first raised by the hon. member, he asked why, you know, we were sitting on this report. Well, I explained that I don't have the report; the chair of AADAC does not have the report; in fact the CEO does not have the report. The chair informs me that the board has not seen the report and will be reviewing it, according to the time line, in June. So clearly the report is being worked on.

Part of what we discussed as to the time line were data errors in the draft report that had to be corrected. Mr. Speaker, this does not cast any aspersions on the researcher, only in somebody's mind who doesn't understand research and reports, because

this is a normal process of going back and forth between the contractor and the researcher. What I am troubled about, frankly, are some of the comments that are alleged to have been made by the hon. member about the credibility of one of the most respected members of the AADAC staff.

MR. SAPERS: I'm trying to remember what that's called.

Mr. Speaker, I'll let that pass, and I will go to the Premier. As long as the minister continues to stonewall, I'll see if the Premier can answer some questions for us. Will the Premier say whether or not he has seen or read or touched or looked at this phantom report, and if he has, will he confirm or deny that it's full of data errors, and will he use his authority to see to it that the report is released immediately?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, to answer his last question first, the report will be released when it's finished, when it's complete.

Now, as to his first question: have I seen the report? No. As a matter of fact, you know, I have a thousand different issues on my plate. This was the furthest thing from my mind until I heard about it through the media, that apparently someone had done a poll or something and that this was to be fed into a comprehensive report on the prevalence of gambling, particularly as it relates to VLTs.

I made some inquiries. I said: what is this report all about? I was advised at that time that the report was expected to be prepared and ready for release sometime in November of this year. So that's all I know about the report. I have not seen the report. I was made aware of a report that is in the process of being prepared sometime last week. I responded to the media. It's just another one of those little brushfires that you have to put out from time to time.

Mr. Speaker, while we're on reports that relate to gambling and when we're talking about reports containing data inaccuracies and data omissions, I would like to allude to the report that was released by the Liberal Party last week.

AN HON. MEMBER: Have you read it?

MR. KLEIN: Read it? Mr. Speaker, I mean, there is really nothing to read. It's riddled with inaccuracies. The Liberals overestimate VLT revenues coming out of Fort Vermilion, for instance, by \$230,000. In the community of Manyberries they overstate VLT revenues by \$194,000. In Nisku they estimate lottery funding at \$990 when it is closer to \$40,000. In Wembley they overestimate VLT revenues out of the community by more than \$100,000.

Mr. Speaker, in the report they talk about – and they use the average of \$80,958 – for instance the VLT toll on St. Albert, \$3,708,000. They're making the assumption that this is all going into my pocket. All of that money in one way or another goes back to the community. It goes back in CFEP; it goes back . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Calgary . . . [interjections] These reports are certainly eliciting a lot of excitement.

For the second main opposition question I'd call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

2:00

Mental Health Services

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Bedlam, instability, bed shortages, confusion, and disruption. Not my

words; these are the words of this government's mental health advocate in describing Alberta's mental health care system. The advocate's latest report speaks of widespread abuses within our mental health system, and that includes things like patients denied access to legal counsel, patients refusing treatment due to outdated medical equipment, mentally ill patients filling surgical/medical beds, and, lastly, increasing numbers of Albertans unable to pay for the prescription drugs they need. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Health. Why have this minister and this government allowed mental health services to deteriorate to this sorry state, or is this a flawed report too?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's too bad that time is not afforded us in the Assembly to read through the whole report for the benefit of the hon. member and all members of the Assembly. Yes, we do have a mental health advocate in this province to review particular cases of alleged abuse. That is one of the protections that's built into our overall health system as far as mental health is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just indicate a few things about the mental health system which might be of interest to the hon. member, of which I thought he was aware. Across this province the mental health system from 1992-93 has served an increase from 12,155 clients to 17,405. The number of available hospital beds, however, has gone down from 950 to 754. Nevertheless, the system is handling more admissions, more outpatients. There's been a very significant increase in the amount of money dedicated to community care over this period of time. Since the opposition is interested, I would just like to point out that in 1992-93 32.3 millions of dollars were spent on community care and in 1998-99 \$52.8 million are planned.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the thing that of course is always possible when you're referring to a report is that you take your selected little phrases out. I remember when he was talking about the report of the Calgary health authority. One of the things that we've changed in the system as far as health is concerned is that we do have performance measures and we do report on them. Some do go down, and we do need to take corrective action. I do want to refer to that because this is the same tactic the hon. member used with respect to the Calgary regional health authority, which has a large number of accomplishments in their report, just as in this one.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: The abuses the minister doesn't want to speak of are on pages 6 to 11 of this report. They're right here.

Mr. Speaker, thank you. My follow-up question to the same minister would be this: given that some Alberta parents are being forced to give up custody in order for their children to get the kind of prescription medication they require, what is the Minister of Health going to do, and is he going to do it immediately?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the whole area of drug therapy, we recognize in our overall business plan that we do need to improve our funding and our coverage of certain very high-cost drugs within the health care system. That is something that we have referred to before, and we do recognize that that is an area that needs action. It is an area that is recognized as an issue for all provinces in this country. Certainly it is properly recognized in that report, but it is also one that we accept as a need, and we're taking action on it.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, for my final question I'd go to the Minister of Family and Social Services, and I'd ask that minister this question: given that this report confirms that underfunding of AISH, the assured income for the severely handicapped program, is creating financial barriers to health services for mentally ill Albertans, will the minister restore the funding and do so immediately so these people can get the help they need?

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AISH program presently is looked upon as being the one of the best programs for the disabled community in Canada. We have the second highest funding in Canada when it comes to funding for the disabled. This is a program that we monitor closely, that we watch. One thing the opposition has to remember is that at the level of \$823, which is what it is, there is no income tax paid in Alberta. We have the best economy. There is no sales tax. I get very, very few complaints about the level of funding for AISH except from the opposition.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Special-needs Education

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While private schools in the province enjoy a 20 percent increase in funds, Alberta's public schools are being undercut again by the government. Fumbled support for literacy programs, quotas on special-needs children, and caps on high school credits combine to frustrate the efforts of public school students, teachers, and their parents. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Why, when six months ago your ministry promised literacy interns would start in schools on May 1, was the paperwork delivered only yesterday, giving school boards three days to hire and put the program in place?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, many points have been raised by the hon. member in his question, not just the issue of the early literacy program. I have to remind him of some of the things that are not quite correct in what he referred to. I think his greatest interest has been expressed with the Edmonton public school board as a result of comments that have emerged from the chair of that board and other members. I want to make it clear that our entire reinvestment in the education area has been based on consultation, including the Growth Summit, including the education summits, meetings with parents, teachers, and other education stakeholders.

Specifically with respect to the Edmonton public school board, Mr. Speaker, that board will see an increase of roughly \$24 million, about 6 percent over last year's budget. School boards have been working on the budgeting process. We recently sent out our funding manual to give them an idea as to the formulas that we would be applying in areas like special needs, and we've identified for them the amount of money that will be available for the early reading initiative.

Because of the funding manual coming out at a relatively late stage, Mr. Speaker, we've given school boards until June 15 to file their budgets with the Department of Education.

AN HON. MEMBER: I thought it was May 1st.

MR. MAR: Well, the hon. member has talked about an April deadline. That's true that there was an April deadline for the filing of budgets, but because of the funding manual coming out relatively recently we're extending that period of time until June 15.

Mr. Speaker, on the subject of the early literacy initiative, what we've indicated to boards as to what that will mean to them is that throughout the province roughly 580 positions – and what that funds on a per position basis is about \$26,000 for the salary and benefits for each 10-month full-time equivalent intern; also on top of that an additional \$4,000 per position for resources and professional development for those interns.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a good-news story. There is reinvestment in education. The hon. member may argue with respect to its timeliness and other things, but we have worked hard with education partners, with the Alberta teachers' union, and with others in order to make particularly the early literacy program work. While it may not be perfect, by all means we are working hard at trying to make this program a successful one.

2:10

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, it was raised by Whitecourt-Lac Ste. Anne.

My second question is: what are parents with newly identified behaviourally disordered children to do now that you've mandated a quota at 1997 numbers for these students?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, two points that I want to make in this regard, the first of which is that the hon. member probably does not need to be reminded that on a per capita basis we increased funding for special-needs students by 30 percent. I think the hon. member would agree that that was a good thing to do. I don't think he's disappointed in that.

Mr. Speaker, that increase on a per capita basis I think was a response to school boards throughout the province who said that the actual cost of dealing with these kids is higher than the amount that the province granted. So I think we take some credit for that and that members in this House would not disagree with that aspect of our changes in funding for special-needs students.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the capping of the number of students at the 1997-98 incidence rates, he's correct. We are capping the incidence rate, but that means we've asked boards, I guess over the last few years, to identify the number of students who have these severe disabilities, and we think the school boards have done a very good job of identifying what the base level of incidence rates is for students that suffer from severe and mild and moderate disabilities. In an effort to provide certainty in terms of how much money the Department of Education and the government of Alberta will be providing to school boards for dealing with these students, yes, it's true. We have identified . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question remains: what happens when a school district gets new students?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the clear question was: if there are more students in a school board, how will the school board deal with it? Well, because the incidence rate is fixed at the 1997-98

levels, if there are more students within a school district, then they'll get more funding assigned for special-needs students, because it's based on the incidence rate. So the greater the enrollment of the number of students in the system times the incidence rate will result in greater funding for special-needs students.

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

Teacher Remuneration

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this Assembly the Minister of Education voted in favour of a private member's motion that undermines the current system of collective bargaining by pushing for a review of the remuneration system of teachers which is intended to tie it to their individual performance. By voting for this motion, the minister has sent a chilling message to 35,000 teachers and every elected school board in the province that when it comes to teacher salaries, the Big Brother provincial government knows best. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why does the minister believe that instituting a new system of having Tory appointees reviewing teachers' salaries behind closed doors is preferable to having teachers' salaries determined through free collective bargaining between elected school boards and the Alberta Teachers' Association?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Education, you just have to answer one of those questions.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I must remind the member that this was a private member's motion and what the motion calls for is a review of remuneration schemes for teachers in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member from across the way referred to a report yesterday from 1956 that talked about the remuneration of teachers. Well, I guess we should look at this issue at least every 40 years.

The issue of what some people term as merit pay is meritorious of consideration. There are teachers who will say that we cannot establish a merit pay system. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, there is a long tradition in parliamentary institutions such as ours that we only have one person speaking at a time. We are in the middle of question period. A question has been asked, and we're attempting to hear the answer by the hon. Minister of Education. We would hope that all hon. members would honour the parliamentary tradition of listening to the answer once the question's been given.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Teacher Remuneration (continued)

MR. MAR: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there are those who will say that you cannot have a merit system for the remuneration of teachers. I think, then, that those teachers who suggest that must look at the existing system, which recognizes that with more years of experience you get paid more and with more academic credentials you get paid more. Those are two aspects of recognizing merit in pay. So for those people that say that you can't have

a merit pay system, then I guess we'll have to re-examine our current system, which recognizes more remuneration for those with more experience and more academic background.

All that is done by this motion, Mr. Speaker, is an urging of the government to review other aspects of merit pay. At the end of the day it may be determined that there is no merit in pursuing that, but maybe there is. I don't think that anybody in government or in the opposition should impede the ability to look at this issue seriously.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the last time the minister appointed a committee to review education we ended up with a huge funding increase for private schools while all along the minister kept on hinting that he's opposed to such increases, why should Albertans trust this government to conduct a fair and impartial review of teachers' pay and benefits now?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, there may have been elements of the private schools task force that I may not have personally supported. That's true, and we've spoken about this before in this Legislative Assembly. But taken as a whole, the process by which the private schools task force went through its recommendations and canvassed the opinions of Albertans throughout the province of Alberta was a very, very fair process.

Mr. Speaker, it is the nature of the process in government and throughout the democratic process that, frankly, you don't always get what you want. The only thing we can promise is that whatever process is put in place will be as fair as the process we went through with the private schools task force.

Mr. Speaker, people will have strong opinions on both sides of this issue. There are those who will say: yes, of course it's difficult to establish factors and elements of merit in a merit pay system. But other people will say: why don't we give it a try? There are others that will say: it's impossible to do.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Final supplemental question.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my final supplementary is to the Minister of Labour. As the minister responsible for ensuring that collective bargaining rules are fair and balanced, how can the minister justify voting for a motion that interferes with the existing system of teacher remuneration being determined through the collective bargaining process with ATA and elected school boards? How can he explain the unfair stand that he has taken?

2:20

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, as much as I want to go into competition with the Minister of Education and his extended ability to finely detail the answers to each and every question, I can only say that I don't negotiate directly with the Alberta Teachers' Association.

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

Bow Valley Centre Demolition

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was surprised to hear media reports that said over 200 residents plus stores and offices within a two-block radius of the Bow Valley hospital site in Calgary will have to be evacuated during the future implosion.

I'm sure this is causing great concern among the local residents. To the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services, the department responsible for the demolition: is this true, and how are you going to proceed with the evacuation?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to inform the House that my department is currently reviewing the demolition plans for the implosion of the buildings on the Bow Valley site. This particular process is quite complicated and involves a lot of safety and technical details. We're working with the Calgary fire marshal and other authorities to ensure that all of the issues are appropriately addressed. Safety naturally is a concern, particularly when it comes to the local residents.

In the case of the question with respect to evacuations, we're currently discussing this with the Calgary fire marshal, and it is up to the Calgary fire marshal to determine if, in fact, evacuations are necessary. Details to this effect have not yet been finalized, but I'd like to assure the House that if evacuations are deemed necessary, they will be well planned, well co-ordinated and will have minimal disruption on the residents.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, Calgary-West.

MS KRYCZKA: Yes, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is again to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. What are you doing to ensure that local residents get accurate and timely information regarding the demolition plans and any impact it will have on them, like evacuation?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to take this opportunity to assure the local residents that we're going to be keeping them informed and that, quite frankly, we have established currently a newsletter that we distribute to the Bridgeland-Riverside community. I would like to thank specifically Karen Morrison, the president of the league, and her volunteers for distributing it. [interjections] I think that I would like the indulgence of the opposition in their remarks. This is a very important issue, and it is extremely important to the people in the area.

I'd like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the residents of the area will be kept informed through their community league, as they have in the past. I'd also like to point out that in addition to the newsletters, we are preparing news packages for the media and the residents that we will be distributing in advance of any event taking place there.

MS KRYCZKA: My second supplemental question, Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister, has to do with timing. I have heard that the implosion will occur on a Sunday at 9 a.m. – and I'm sure people are wondering about that also – but not the actual date. When will we know the date?

MR. WOLOSHYN: The member is partially correct. It likely will occur on a Sunday, the reason being that the Calgary city police, with whom we are also consulting on this whole issue, feel, along with the fire marshal, that a closure of Memorial

Drive is a necessity when the implosion occurs. Consequently, it appears that Sunday is the likely day. Nine o'clock seems like a reasonable time of day to do it.

For those members who haven't been involved in this process, one of the big concerns is the wind and the amount of dust. We are very concerned about that, so even at the last moment the date or time could be changed if climatic conditions are not proper. But what I'd like to inform the House very specifically of is that once we have the agreement with the fire marshall, we will give sufficient notice to all people, residents, through the media and whatever. So it won't be a sudden event. You'll have plenty of time to watch your televisions to watch the event.

Speaker's Ruling Brevity

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Before I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, I would just remind people for general reading that we have *Beauchesne* 408. It talks about oral questions, and "answers to questions should be as brief as possible, should deal with the matter raised, and should not provoke debate." At the same time, when you ask a question and throw in a number of what might be called gratuitous remarks or extraneous facts and then ask four or five or six questions within it, it becomes very difficult to ride herd on a minister who is trying to answer all of questions. If we could have one succinct question, we could then demand one succinct answer. To both sides.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

User Fees

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Last October the Premier said: we'd better look very, very carefully at user fees just as we look at taxation because we want to maintain that competitive position. Mr. Speaker, new data from Statistics Canada states that Alberta now has the second highest level of user fees among all Canadian provinces. Furthermore, Alberta also has the fourth highest rate of increase in user fees over the past five years. My succinct question to the Premier would be this: why does Alberta now have the second highest level of user fees in all of Canada?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the general policy relative to user fees is that they should cover the cost of providing the service. I would remind the hon. member that that information may be correct. I haven't had a chance to examine it, but it is something that we should constantly review because, as he so correctly points out, we do not want to lose our competitive edge.

We do indeed have the competitive edge, notwithstanding the assertions made by Statistics Canada. The competitive edge comes about as a result of having the lowest personal income tax regime, the lowest corporate tax regime, no sales tax, no payroll tax. We have the lowest aviation fuel tax in the country, the lowest locomotive fuel tax. We no longer have the machinery and equipment tax in the province. So there are many, many compensating factors that have to be taken into account. Indeed, we do take these compensating factors into account when we go out and sell the Alberta advantage.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why is Budget '98 still projecting an additional \$29 million in user fee increases

over the next three years, and how does that improve our competitive edge in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I have to repeat that all user fees are examined very, very carefully. User fees are put in place to essentially cover the cost of providing the service.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: I want to ask the Premier if he will change government policy and require all user fees to come into this Legislature for full scrutiny and full debate before those user fees come into being provincial law.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, what we tried to do relative to user fees is that we consult extensively with industry. In the case of environmental fees I know that we've gone to the new WIN program, the wildlife . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry to interrupt you, hon. Premier. You have two ministers that are attempting to supplement your question while you are answering it and another one to supplement the question over on the other side. It's rather difficult to hear you, and I'm sure that your answer is important. So if all of those members mentioned but not named would close up for the moment, we could hear the Premier.

User Fees (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, with respect to bringing all of these matters to the Legislature, this Legislature sits to consider legislation. It does not sit to consider government policy, although it can be discussed through question period. There is a place for a motion if the hon. member wishes to place a motion relative to policy. But to bring each and every one of these items to the Legislature, I just don't know if that indeed is a function of this Legislature. That is a matter of government policy. That is a matter of carrying out the day-to-day business of government. I can assure the hon. member, however, that with respect to user fees there is normally extensive consultation with the industries and the organizations affected, and I would think that there are very few if any exceptions.

2:30

There's another thing that should be pointed out about user fees, Mr. Speaker. Not all the people pay all the user fees all the time. User fees are applied to those people who want to take advantage of a particular service and are willing to pay for those services.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Academic Upgrading Program

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very successful academic upgrade program has provided opportunity for all people in this province to get off the welfare rolls and into the workforce. My question today is to the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services. In Fort Macleod an academic upgrade program has been offered to train welfare recipients for several years. Funding from your department for this program has stopped. Can you tell me why?

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely I can tell you why. Since 1993 we've been working closely with Advanced Education and Career Development to provide a training program for welfare recipients in the Fort Macleod area. Quite literally, this program was a victim of its own success. It used the people who used to be on welfare in that area. There aren't any people there. In the Fort Macleod area we're looking at probably a 96, 97 percent employment rate. At the same time we've seen welfare rolls drop completely. So this program, which has helped a lot of people – quite literally, we don't have any more people in that area that can benefit from this program.

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, for that same minister: will the Fort Macleod program continue, then, to operate?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, from what I understand, as with all good programs this program has changed its focus to another group of people, to a group of clientele that still needs to be retrained. Alberta Family and Social Services will not be putting any money into this program due to the fact that it is no longer servicing our clients, but from what I understand, the program will continue and it will be funded in other fashions.

MR. COUTTS: Then my second supplemental would be to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. Can that minister, then, confirm that Lethbridge Community College would be able to continue delivery of this program?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we can, I think, partially confirm this program. Funds have been provided to Lethbridge Community College to complete a program to the end of June of this year. My understanding is that they are now discussing with the Chinook educational consortium the opportunity to use facilities, because, once again, my understanding is that part of this tremendous cost that we ran into was rent on facilities. So assuming that the Chinook educational consortium and Lethbridge Community College can come to some sort of arrangement on the facilities, then it would be our anticipation that the program would be available starting September of '98.

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

Highway 794

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I was at a meeting with over 100 people concerned about the hazardous conditions of highway 794. Unlike the minister of transportation, these people are worried about the safety of their children and family and friends, and their continuous pleas for help are falling on deaf ears. My questions are for the minister of transportation. Why won't you give Sturgeon county the same cost-sharing deal that you gave the MD of Westlock on highway 794?

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take some offence that the minister doesn't care about any particular people in this province. I think that's very unfortunate. I want to make

it very clear that we do care, and we do care about all aspects of all roads in this province.

Highway 794, of course, is a project that we have announced. We've announced 17 kilometres on 794. The priorities of the road are . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: That's not what they asked for. They want the same deal as Westlock.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, if you'd please, please allow me to answer this question.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. members have already been reminded of courtesy and good manners, and I guess it bears repeating. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has asked a question of the Minister of Transportation and Utilities, and I'm sure that she and all our colleagues will listen quietly while the hon. minister gives a brief explanation.

Hon. minister.

Highway 794 (continued)

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation on 794, as I pointed out yesterday and was pointed out last night – Transportation did have representatives at the meeting, as we had committed to. There were representatives of Transportation at the meeting to hear the people. We had commitments in the House, and we fulfilled our commitments in the House last night.

The question on 794 basically is that it be converted to . . . [interjection] Do you want an answer?

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, if you want an answer, please allow me to answer. Please.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, you do not need to engage the person that's attempting to answer the question with your editorial comment. So, hon. minister, if you would speak through the chair and ignore other folk that may be here and succinctly get to your answer, that would be helpful.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

Highway 794 (continued)

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were two requests last night, as I understand. One was that 794 be identified as a primary highway. The second request was also that consideration be given to the widening of the surface of 794 to 11 metres. As I pointed out yesterday in response to the question, both of those items are being reviewed, and the information is being gathered. Indeed once that review has been completed, then we'll be in a better position to discuss the situation.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: First supplemental, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that people are on the verge of blocking off highway 794 in protest, what is it going to take for the minister to do the right thing? Make it safe. Plan it this year. How many deaths does it take? What's the magic number?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, you only need to answer one of that long list of questions.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it would be very unfortunate if indeed we have people considering blockading the roads of this province, because they're for the use of all Albertans. They're funded by all Albertans, and it would be very, very unfortunate if we would have anyone condoning that type of action in this province.

The issue basically is being reviewed. The situation on 794 is indeed one that we are looking at. The accident rates on 794 are not above provincial average, so it is not a road that is that dangerous. What we really are looking at is: should the traffic warrant additional expansion of the surface, and indeed does it meet the criteria of a primary highway? Now, there are criteria for a primary highway, Mr. Speaker, and to make adjustments to the criteria that all of the rest of Albertans have to adhere to simply because we have an MLA that doesn't want to adhere to those criteria is not fair to the rest of Albertans.

MRS. SOETAERT: My final question, Mr. Speaker: why do you put partisan politics ahead of the safety of people? Are the lives of the people in Westlock more important than the lives of the people in Sturgeon?

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

2:40

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To start with, I want to point out . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Inflammatory Language

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. ministers and hon. members of the opposition, a rather serious accusation has been put into the question. That kind of rhetoric only inflames others to enter into the debate. [interjection] Within that question, hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, there are some issues that I think can be directly answered by the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Let us hear them.

Highway 794 (continued)

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would appreciate an apology because that was not a true statement. It is one that I do not condone and certainly is taking the use of liberties of this House. I consider that to be in excess of the privileges of an MLA.

To start with, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that we do care about all Albertans, and we care about them in a fair and just manner. It's very unfortunate that we have a representative that wants to create a bias situation regarding any road in this province. We are looking at the road. To start with, this is a secondary road that is a responsibility of the municipality, not the government of Alberta. The primary responsibility is that of the

municipality. I want to make it clear that indeed we work closely with all municipalities to see that we meet their priorities. Once we sit down with the municipalities and assess the situation, the proper decisions are made, as they are made on 794.

Recognitions

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we'll take a very brief break, and you can recognize then. But before you do, the following are going to speak in this order: Calgary-West, Edmonton-Riverview, St. Albert, Edmonton-Norwood, Calgary-Fort, Edmonton-Strathcona.

Ann McCaig

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured today to recognize Chancellor Ann McCaig for her outstanding contributions to the University of Calgary. Ann McCaig first directed her energy and enthusiasm to the university in 1984 with her appointment to the board of governors. She served on the Committee of Art for Public Places, was a member of the presidential search committees in 1989 and 1996, and was chairman of the university's Personnel Policy Committee, responsible to 3,700 employees. Organizer par excellence, Ann McCaig as vice-chair spearheaded and exceeded the goal of \$40 million of the national Building on the Vision fund-raising campaign, raising \$46 million for the University of Calgary.

Since being elected in 1994, Ann McCaig has raised the position of chancellor to another level through her vision, wisdom, strength, commitment, enthusiasm, and charm. She has been both a catalyst for change and a steady influence for the University of Calgary during a period of significant changes. Ann McCaig will be long remembered by thousands of graduates as a dynamic community leader and an outstanding chancellor and ambassador for the University of Calgary.

Thank you.

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

Community Options

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon and recognize the board and staff of Community Options: A Society for Children and Families for recently having been awarded the Alberta Association for Community Living award. This award is given annually by the AACL to individuals and agencies that promote the concept of community inclusion for people with developmental disabilities.

Community Options for Children and Families is a worthy recipient of the award, having provided for over 20 years a variety of programs and services to children from birth to grade 6 and their families, including accredited quality child care programs for children with disabilities, family counseling, staff in-service training, advocacy, nutrition, and advanced child and family support for low-income families and families at risk. Founded in 1976, the organization was one of the first to offer quality, inclusive child care. Currently affiliated with CAFRA, the Child and Family Resource Association, Community Options serves over 400 families per year.

May I extend our congratulations and thanks to this society for their long-standing activism and advocacy for the total inclusion of young children in their innovative family programs.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by Edmonton-Norwood.

Alberta Library Week

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta Library Week starts May 3 and runs until May 9. This special week was established last year to raise awareness of library services and to promote lifelong learning.

The theme of Alberta Library Week this year is: grow with your library. For individuals this theme encourages personal and professional development through the use of library materials and services. For businesses the grow theme encourages using the library for business research.

Libraries across the province are inviting all Albertans to drop in during Library Week for special activities and displays. I would like to encourage all members of this Assembly to do the same.

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

Drug Abuse Resistance Education

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The drug abuse resistance education program recently had 25 graduates from the St. Alphonsus elementary school in my riding of Edmonton-Norwood. I would like to congratulate these students for their dedication in completing the DARE program. I would also like to commend the work of Constable Greg Murray of the Edmonton Police Service for instructing in the program. This program takes an awful lot of time, and it's an awful lot of volunteer instruction that the members of the Edmonton Police Service give to the community for this program. The DARE program aims to help children to make better decisions in life and develop their confidence to say no to peer pressure. The program has operated in Edmonton since 1993. This year 58 schools in Edmonton will be participating in the program, for a total of over 2,800 student graduates.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by Edmonton-Strathcona.

Chemical Industry

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the contribution of an Alberta industry which is very important but less publicized. The chemical industry is a positive economic force for Alberta. Roughly one-quarter of Canada's chemical production capacity and more than half of its petrochemical capacity is located in Alberta, one of the most important chemical industry sites in North America.

Currently the chemical industry in Alberta has \$6 billion annual production, the second largest manufacturing sector after food products. It accounts for \$2.3 billion annual export to the world market. It provides 6,200 quality and high-tech jobs directly and 19,000 spin-off jobs in the economy.

Currently the industry is planning on a \$3.5 billion investment. The Alberta chemical industry takes local feedstock, over half of Alberta's gas consumption. In addition to exporting the product outputs, it supplies to local refining, pulp and paper, mining, fertilizer, and other industry sectors.

Since local value-added processing is to the benefit of Albertans, we have to ensure the industry stays healthy in Alberta. It

means the feedstock remains ample and pricing stays competitive. It means the regulatory framework is a level field for industry investment.

I would call on the members of the Assembly to join me in commending the chemical industry leaders, the companies and the employees, for their outstanding contribution to the well-being of all Albertans.

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

Lance Relland

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I consider it a pleasure and an honour to acknowledge an inspiring young Albertan. His name is Lance Relland. His recovery alone is an inspirational story. He had the will to live despite all odds, but that's only part of the story.

In 1993, at the age of 13, Lance founded the Theatre Arts Community Outreach Society with a \$2,000 grant from the Canadian Native Arts Foundation. It was intended to offer youth an opportunity to explore their artistic interests. This included dance, drama, and music. It has since expanded to include courses on first aid, environmental projects, Canadian heritage, special-needs programs, and alternative medicine.

It is now an international organization with Australia, United States, and Czech Republic connections. Most recently the foundation has been acting as an advocate for children with leukemia who need bone marrow transplants.

I consider Lance to be a young man of unusual strength, courage, and talent. It is an honour to acknowledge all that he has contributed to the development of the arts, his efforts to advance the interests of the First Nations community, and particularly his personal story of healing.

2:50

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: We have several points of order arising out of the question period and some comments that the chair will make on other events. Right now we'll call on the first point of order. I believe it was Edmonton-Rutherford.

Point of Order Brevity in Question Period

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I refer to *Beauchesne* 417, which deals with three aspects. First of all, to be brief. I didn't consider the Premier being very brief. Secondly, to deal with the matter that was raised. The matter that was raised was the question of the Wynne report, not the question of the excellent report that was filed by the Liberals last week. Thirdly, it is not to provoke debate. Well, when the Premier slips in derogatory comments about a document he shouldn't even be dealing with, that of course is going to provoke debate.

Let me just tell you what he said. He implied that our figures were way out of whack. Well, just to inform the members of the House . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: If in your estimation the words were offending, then we don't need to be offended again. Just briefly state your point of order, and then we'll hear if anyone wishes to speak to it before I speak to it.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, thank you. He referred to figures on the VLT revenues as being incorrect. Those figures in

that report came from government documents. So possibly they are incorrect, but if they're incorrect, it's because government would have then released incorrect figures, and we have to rely on government figures to an extent, like all Albertans do.

Secondly, there was reference made that we had not taken into consideration the 15 percent that the . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: In fact, you're debating the value of the report, which I'm sure is very valuable and thought to be so because it was tabled, as I understand it. In any event, on the point of order, please, hon. member.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to point out why he provoked debate by making these allegations: for example, that the 15 percent that's taken by the hotels and the bars was not taken into consideration when in fact it was; that the winnings were not taken into consideration when in fact they were.

To sum up, Mr. Speaker, I am simply saying that members of this House have a responsibility to govern themselves in terms of accuracy, fair play, and statesmanship. I don't think we've been seeing that from that side in the last few days. That was clearly in my opinion a legitimate point of order.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it remarkable that the member would refer to statesmanship in light of what we just heard from the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

In any event, while I recognize that *Beauchesne* 417 indicates that "answers to questions should be as brief as possible," this is a complex issue. I believe that if the hon. member across the way has any interest in receiving an answer to his question, then sometimes the answer is a little longer than he'd prefer to see. I think you've demonstrated some flexibility in allowing ministers to answer because sometimes a complete answer is required as opposed to a partial one or a yes or no answer.

Mr. Speaker, he also referred to: the matter raised "should not provoke debate." Well, again the Premier took some licence to bring some other issues to the table because he felt, and I think quite appropriately so, that they impacted on the issue that was being raised. And when we talk about provoking debate, I think you should remind the member and all members across the way that the manner in which they ask the questions quite often is what is provoking the debate in the response they get. If they don't like the answer they get, then don't ask the questions in the way they do so.

There's no point of order here at all, Mr. Speaker. I think the Premier was simply trying to answer as fully as possible. I won't get into the merits of the document that was being tabled, although I do understand that whether or not the information in the report was government information, I believe the presentation was manipulated to such an extent that it would lead to an inaccurate conclusion.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The chair has listened with interest to both sides on this. I think it's basically an extension of debate, and I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has had the opportunity to clarify certain issues. I think we would basically leave it at that and go on with the next point of order, which is the hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Allegations against Members

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the last discussion this is, I think, a very legitimate point of order. I stand under two sections of the Standing Orders, section 23, including (h), (i), and (j), and also section 15(1), dealing with privilege.

Before going into some detail, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to seriously consider in question period enforcing the terms of the House leader agreement, because I think that if those were enforced basically in the spirit in which they were intended, we would eliminate a lot of what's been happening here from the opposition in the past while.

If I recall, Mr. Speaker – I don't have the Blues – I believe a very serious allegation was made by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. I believe that she stated that the Minister of Transportation and Utilities placed politics above the safety of individuals. Quite clearly that offends 23(h), (i), and (j), but more specifically I believe it also offends Standing Order 15(1). I believe what has occurred here is "a breach of the rights of the Assembly."

What I would like to have you do, if acceptable, is allow me as House leader to review *Hansard* and allow me to pursue a question of privilege tomorrow with you. I understand that these matters need to be raised within a certain time frame, but I do need some time to examine whether or not the rights of the Assembly have been breached by what I consider to be a very outrageous and insulting statement made by the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, that seems to be the trend from that particular member in the last couple of months.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the point of order.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the point of order, what I want to do is just reflect on the context within which that comment was made coming out of the meetings last night, where partisanship politics was a major part of the discussion. The member in the question was reflecting the mood of the meeting last night when they were talking about the community's perceived inequities relative to why at a county boundary there was a different funding level on a cost-shared basis for the road, why certain parts of the road were being upgraded rather than others.

The people of that community need to have the minister respond in a way that will provide them with the factual information that can set their minds at ease in the context of the fairness and the equity the minister was talking about. This is one of the most important things that we have to deal with in terms of putting in place our public infrastructure, this fairness and equity. We want to make sure that the people feel that is how they're being held.

So, Mr. Speaker, I feel that the member was reflecting the mood of the meeting last night as much as any other personal attack in that comment, and I think it should be dealt with in that context. If you honour the House leader's request to look at this tomorrow in terms of the context of a point of privilege, I think you would have to take into account the mood of the meeting she was reporting on as part of your reflection of how this question came up and the mood of the question and the points that were being brought out in the question as reflecting the requests of the people at the meeting last night.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I'll let the hon. minister of transportation speak in a moment. I just would remind hon. members that Standing Order 15 has been mentioned, and I think that if you read a little further in here, in section (2):

A member wishing to raise a question of privilege shall give written notice containing a brief statement of the question to the Speaker and, if practicable, to any person whose conduct may be called into question, at least two hours before the opening of the head:sitting and before the Orders of the Day are called.

We presumably are in that time frame.

The hon. minister of transportation would like to speak to the particular issue and then presumably the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to make it very clear that we had a member from Transportation that was in discussions with those people this morning, and it is my understanding that all the questions were answered last night. So it's not too likely that there was misrepresentation, as has just been indicated.

I, too, would like to be able to have the opportunity of reviewing *Hansard*. I want to retain the right to ask for a ruling regarding a point of privilege, because statements were certainly made that were what I consider totally neither true nor factual. Indeed I want to be able to have the opportunity of retaining the right of privilege. They are a breach of rights of the Assembly here. They are damaging to myself as a minister. They are damaging to the integrity of the department and the ministry and certainly damaging to all involved here. I think this is a very serious case. I take it very seriously. That type of action I don't believe is to be tolerated in this House.

3:00

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When reviewing this, would you please go over the information I tabled this afternoon, which is a letter from the county of Sturgeon indicating the funding arrangement that Westlock got that they've been asking for. They sent this letter to the Premier on March 20. They still do not have a reply. The minister is well aware of their request, and there was no doubt about the feeling of that meeting last night and that the people of Westlock seemed to get a far better deal than others.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, just if I may.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have no interest in shutting down further discussion on it, but I think a rather serious point of order and a serious possible point of privilege has been raised here, which I won't endeavour to answer at this time. I will take it under advisement and bring it forward as soon as we've been able to read the Blues and see what was happening.

As to what happens in other meetings and so on, whether that can be considered as to what happens in the Chamber, it's the chair's duty to deal with what's happening in the Chamber. So without sort of getting into the details, if you have a particular item on this road, perhaps you could convey that to the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. But I think I will leave further dealing with the point of order and the possible point of privilege and hopefully be able to deal with it tomorrow, if that's acceptable.

Speaker's Ruling Tabling Documents

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Now we have another one here. Earlier in the events of today we had during routine proceedings, during tablings – the chair would like to draw all hon. members' attention to the Speaker's Ruling of April 11, 1995, and August 20, 1996, where the chair ruled that only the most basic description of the document to be tabled would be allowed. Accordingly, if a member wishes to table amendments during the routine that he or she intends to move when the bill in question comes to Committee of the Whole, it would be appropriate to make only a very brief statement indicating the bill to which the amendments relate. It is not appropriate for the member to discuss the nature of these amendments.

As all hon. members know, if you're going to make an amendment, you have ample time in Committee of the Whole to elaborate, for up to 20 minutes, on that particular amendment, and your colleagues can go on for a considerable length of time. So this type of commentary should be reserved for Committee of the Whole consideration of the amendment, where it's appropriate for the discussion to occur. Just take that into reference, and with any further occurrences of descriptions of amendments we'll just take the tablings and get on with it.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You're wanting to comment on my comments?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 13(2) I believe I have the ability to ask you to explain the reasons for the ruling. Are you suggesting, in light of that ruling, that it's appropriate now for any member of this House to use tablings to place before the House amendments which are more appropriately dealt with at Committee of the Whole? Because I can see some procedural difficulties in the future. If you're saying, "Yes, it's wide open," then I think you'd better expect for that to be abused.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, we have to take this in the context of the fact that closure has been imposed on this bill in committee. We have to be able to look at it in the context of whether or not the proposer of that amendment feels there will be enough time for those amendments to be heard during the debate that is left before closure is invoked. In that context we have to look at it in terms of: if this is a tabling to get an issue into public debate, then we have to give them the time to make sure that two or three statements are made relative to the significance and importance of that. It cannot occur during Committee of the Whole debate because closure has already been invoked.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Well, on the point that was raised by the hon. Government House Leader, to the chair's knowledge and understanding, there never has been any prohibition for amendments to be tabled during the normal routine. What we were dealing with is the descriptions of them, because as the chair mentioned, of course we have particularly extenuating circumstances, which was alluded to. I think, nevertheless, out of courtesy amendments have been given at tablings for heads up and that kind of thing and maybe for other purposes. All I was trying to do was to indicate that while they can be tabled, they can't be elaborated on. They can be briefly described.

I think that's all the things that we can deal with right now.

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.

[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 94, 95, and 96.

[Motion carried]

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.

[Debate adjourned April 22: Dr. Pannu speaking]

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was making closing remarks on April 22 when we adjourned the debate at 5:30, so with your permission I would like to conclude now.

Motion 94 of course requested information from the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services with respect to the costs and benefits of outsourcing computing services. I was drawing attention to the fact that millions and millions of dollars of public money are being spent by this government without any assurance being provided to Albertans by way of hard data that the decisions with respect to outsourcing and privatization are delivering either cost savings or special benefits that would not have accrued to this government and to the people of Alberta had that outsourcing and privatization not been undertaken.

Let me elaborate for a minute or two on the costs that I referred to of millions and millions of dollars. According to the public accounts of this province, in 1997 IBM received \$33.1 million in government contracts from 16 different departments. SHL Systemhouse received \$24.2 million from the same 16 departments. The government recently announced tens of millions of dollars of funding to RHAs to deal with the year 2000 problem. These are huge amounts of money being spent, being spent in a way that needs careful evaluation. Albertans have a right to know whether they are receiving value for money through all of this outsourcing of computer services. The government's decisions obviously, at least to me, seem to result in making some of the biggest, most profitable corporations in the world even richer and wealthier. Outsourcing of computer services to these companies is costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

3:10

Now, I had an opportunity over this week to speak personally to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. He thinks that my question is serious, that Albertans need to know the answers requested in my motion for a return, but he felt that I'm

asking for too much at any one time, that the question is a bit too general. I have the following proposal to make to the minister, and I will conclude with these proposals. If his only reason to turn down my request was related to the general nature of the request, then I would like to submit to the minister today that he undertake to reply and make the information available, as requested in Motion for a Return 94, department by department.

I would ask him to start in alphabetical order, from A to Z, seeing what departments come first. He could certainly take one week for each department – it would be quite fine with me – so long as he releases the information requested for each of the departments, using the alphabetical order, one every week. That way his staff won't be overburdened, and certainly I would receive the information that I've asked for on behalf of my constituents and on behalf of Albertans.

If he thinks that he cannot even favourably address this request of mine, which I have now made, I hope, more concrete and therefore more practicable from his point of view, then he should probably make a formal request to the Auditor General of this province, who has the technical capacity, professional competence, and financial resources to address the request at hand. In fact, I don't see any difficulty, because my request does involve the question of whether or not the hundreds of millions of dollars that this government is spending on computer services outsourcing are indeed being spent wisely. I'm sure the minister and the government and the people of Alberta are all interested in finding out about the wisdom of the way in which this money is being spent.

So he could do both things. He could certainly release the information that his department can do step by step, week by week, taking one department at a time, and at the same time make a formal request to the Auditor General to engage in a thorough, on-going review of the costs and benefits of these practices. I have a feeling that the department may not have the technical capability and the availability of professional competencies and skills that are required to do a serious cost-benefit analysis. That's why I propose to the minister – and I'll conclude my closing remarks with this request of mine – to do both of these things: that he ask the Auditor General to undertake an independent review of this practice and that at the same time the minister proceed with dealing with my request of preparing and releasing information department by department on the money spent with respect to computer services outsourcing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

Michener Centre Laundry Services

M95. Dr. Pannu moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents associated with the contracting out of laundry services, both on-site and off-site, at the Michener Centre in Red Deer from January 1, 1994, to the present.

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

DR. OBERG: Sure.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I understand that's acceptance?

DR. OBERG: Yes.

DR. PANNU: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Al-Pac Pulp Mill Project

M96. Mr. Zwozdesky moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the following agreements relating to the Al-Pac pulp mill project: paper mill agreement between the borrowers dated September 4, 1991; guarantee agreement, paper mill commitment, dated September 4, 1991, made by MC Forest Investment Inc. in favour of the province; guarantee agreement, paper mill commitment, dated September 4, 1991, made by Kanzaki Paper in favour of the province; and option to purchase dated September 4, 1991, made among the borrowers and the minister of forestry, lands and wildlife and acknowledged by Al-Pac.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't beat any record today in brevity. We find it necessary to make some amendments here. First of all, some of this information we cannot release without the prior consent of a third party, so we'll have to make those amendments. Then there are some other amendments that we must make to clearly identify the corporation or company that the hon. member was trying to find information about. So we have to add "where consent of other parties can be obtained" following "that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing" and then strike out "MC Forest Investment Inc." and substitute "Mitsubishi Corporation" and add "Mfg. Co. Ltd." after "Kanzaki Paper."

So the motion will now read:

. . . that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing, where consent of the other parties can be obtained, copies of the following agreements relating to the Al-Pac pulp mill project: paper mill agreement between the borrowers dated September 4, 1991; guarantee agreement, paper mill commitment, dated September 4, 1991, made by Mitsubishi Corporation in favour of the province; guarantee agreement, paper mill commitment, dated September 4, 1991, made by Kanzaki Paper Mfg. Co. Ltd. in favour of the province; and option to purchase dated September 4, 1991, made among the borrowers and the minister of forestry, lands and wildlife and acknowledged by Al-Pac.

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

3:20

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. I want to thank the hon. minister for his explanation which justifies the need for him to change the motion as he's read it. I appreciate those concerns. I just want to point out that the motion, in order to meet legislative deadlines, had to be drafted just prior to Christmas. Therefore, since some changes have been made to the corporations in question, I have no problem with that, and I have no difficulties with respect to the proposed changes, the amendments as they are referred to, which the hon. minister has made. So I will accept those amendments and sincerely hope that the minister will do everything he can within his power to encourage the participating parties to in fact comply with the request.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise just to briefly make a few final comments, and then we can close off debate on this motion and look forward to the responses. The agreements that we're looking for here really constitute documents that form part of the closing agreements that were construed between the government of Alberta, Crestbrook Forest Industries, Kanzaki Paper, and MC Forest, which is how all the companies at the time were known, with respect to the financing, construction, and operation of the Al-Pac pulp mill project, which in fact is actually a two-stage project, which I know the minister knows, and involves the construction of both a pulp mill and a possible paper mill in the Athabasca area.

I want to just state again, Mr. Speaker, that I think it's a responsible position to take, to advocate on behalf of taxpayers who feel they have a right to know the various elements that are contained within these different legal agreements to ensure that the government did in fact exercise its maximum leverage in the Al-Pac exit, as it has been described, with respect to the Al-Pac pulp mill project.

Mr. Speaker, there will be an unfortunate loss of some \$155 million in forgone interest once the deal with Crestbrook and Mitsubishi closes on or about May 15, and I think that's a very serious loss. Taxpayers simply want to make sure that what has been touted by the government as being the best exit possible, the best deal possible, is in fact that. They would seek a level of comfort with some verification, and I think these documents would help point that out, because the documents do talk about pulp price thresholds, income and net profit scenarios, and other trigger points that would make payments possible.

When you take a look at the deal and begin to really get into the details of it, which the provision of some of the documents requested would help shed some light on, it's at that point that you begin to realize what some of the possibilities are or are not. It's a very straightforward deal. We know that pulp prices haven't risen. We understand that. I'm not faulting the current government for having gotten into that deal. Quite the opposite. I congratulate them for having taken some initiative to get us out of it. The issue is: have we made the best deal possible? That's all it is. That's all the issue is, Mr. Speaker.

I think that if you take a look at an existing precedent with respect to a similar loan or loan guarantee, we can look at the openness and accountability that was demonstrated by the government with respect to a tabling in this Assembly. I believe it was in 1994, hon. minister, that your government in fact did table and disclose documents that related to the sale of the Gainers operation to Burns Foods at a loss of about \$209 million. That, too, wasn't a deal that you got us into, but at least the government of the day, of 1994, had the courage to bring forward in a very open, accountable, transparent way all those documents, and taxpayers were quite satisfied to see what the paper trail was. It doesn't mean we or they or you had to agree with it, but there was a sense of openness and accountability. You could point the finger at the past, into that so-called box of sins of the past, which we're fortunately almost out of entirely now, and it didn't do anything to harm the government, and I don't think this would either.

So why not table the closing arrangements, the closing agree-

ments with respect to the Al-Pac matter so that taxpayers can be assured that the maximum leverage was applied, the maximum recovery was in fact returned to the province, and that the province exercised the best option available? Why not table this and put a rest to this matter? Let's put it behind us, and let's move on. There are other important issues to deal with, but this one won't go away until there's that sense of openness and accountability on the part of the government to the taxpayers.

I'd just add that I think we need some assurance from not only the minister of the environment but also from the Provincial Treasurer with respect to tabling all those closing agreements between the government, Crestbrook, and Mitsubishi when the sale of the \$415 million government loan comes to a close on May 15 so that this issue can at that point be finalized, can be justified, can be explained, and will have fully been accounted for. I wouldn't be surprised if the Auditor General would even make favourable comments in that regard. Although I haven't talked to him about this deal, we've certainly pursued it as far as we could in Public Accounts and elsewhere.

The very last thing is just with respect to the paper mill commitment agreements. The paper mill isn't something that we've spoken a lot on recently, Mr. Speaker. In fact, we haven't really talked about the paper mill for about a year; that is, as opposed to the pulp mill. The Treasurer did tell us that there was no legal binding commitment to provide up to \$150 million in government financing to facilitate the construction of the paper mill, which is the accompanying agreement, if you will, to the two-phase project. But the question remains still in my mind and in the minds of other taxpayers as to whether or not there was a moral obligation, and perhaps there wasn't. But this would help put that to rest. Maybe the Goepel Shields report would reflect on that, but we don't know.

The last sentence I want to say is that the option to purchase agreement should also be discussed. In particular, what sorts of terms and conditions were specified in the option to purchase agreement between the Al-Pac joint venture partners and the ministry of forestry, lands and wildlife, as it was called back then? Perhaps some explanations could be forthcoming there.

Mr. Speaker, I will take my spot having said those brief comments. Again, I wanted to get them on the record just as kind of a guideline or a guidepost to sort of show what it is that I have received over the last year or so by way of comments and questions to my constituency office and to my legislative office on behalf of several dozen people who have called me with respect to this issue. They are simply questions that I think are very legitimate, and they are not ones I have answers to. I'm hoping that the ministers will combine and come forward with the information requested. I thank the minister of the environment for undertaking the motion as amended.

Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

3:30 Statement by the Speaker Sequence of Business

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, before beginning consideration of private members' public bills this afternoon, I feel it would be useful to review the order of such business which may – and I emphasize the word “may” – come up for consideration this afternoon. Whether we get through the full agenda is of course dependent on the amount of time spent in debate on any one of these items of business.

The first item of business due for consideration pursuant to

Standing Order 8(5)(c) is Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 212, Amusements Amendment Act, 1998, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Once Committee of the Whole reports to the Assembly, second reading of Bill 215, Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998, will then resume where debate was adjourned yesterday afternoon with the hon. Member for Calgary-West speaking. A total of 67 minutes remains on second reading of this Bill 215.

Time permitting and in keeping with the request from the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler tabled Thursday last, Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 213, School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998, will then follow.

Should the committee report to the Assembly prior to the 5:30 adjournment and in keeping with the request tabled yesterday afternoon by the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, third reading of Bill 212 will then follow.

So to recap the order of business for this afternoon: Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 212 is first, followed by second reading of Bill 215, followed by Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 213, followed by third reading of Bill 212. If these things are really moving right along, second reading of 216 could also begin.

**head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole**

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Bill 212 Amusements Amendment Act, 1998

MRS. FRITZ: Madam Chairman, I'm pleased that the Amusements Amendment Act, 1998, has finally reached the stage of Committee of the Whole. As you know, it means that we've agreed in principle that we need to address the accessibility of pornography to minors within the scope of our jurisdiction.

Before I begin though, Madam Chairman, I'd like to read into the record what our Alberta courts have recognized as pornography and how it has been defined through the courts: material that portrays sexual activity wherein one or more participants is degraded, dehumanized, and portrayed as objects of sexual or physical abuse, and pornography is also nonviolent material which shows the sexual abuse of children. The reason I read that into the record is so hopefully those who may read *Hansard* will know that this bill and what we're doing with it is stopping the access of minors, meaning those under the age of 18, to pornography and that our court systems will support that based on this definition.

We need to address today how this will be accomplished, Madam Chairman. Other provinces have taken an approach which requires a very intrusive system of enforcement and compliance, and the approach that I propose with Bill 212 would legislate what I believe is a far more practical one.

In this bill, as you know, we've made it the responsibility of the video store owner or the video exchange operator to determine which of the videos they offer should be segregated from mainstream videos and restricted from minors' access. This bill sets out simple guidelines for a store owner to reference which are easily understood and can be easily complied with. I believe it's important to make the legislation as clear as possible so it can be easily understood and is not too complicated for individuals who must abide by it, and that's because we know this is simply the framework and onto that we're going to then in the future be adding regulations.

During second reading the Member for Edmonton-Centre made a few comments on this bill. I appreciate the support that has been given to this bill from that member, and I thank her for the suggestions. The first issue raised by the member opposite addressed the definition of a minor and how it is referenced in the bill. I relooked at that, hon. member, and it's my feeling that it's necessary to specifically define a minor in the bill as someone under the age of 18 at this time so that when reading the Amusements Amendment Act in its entirety, it's clear to all Albertans. I went back and reviewed the act with those comments that you had in mind.

As legislators we deal with legislation on a regular basis, and we know a reference to the Age of Majority Act means someone under the age of 18, but someone else may not make the connection as easily. I wanted the bill to be written in plain language so that the procedures it outlines are clear without making reference to other legislation just so it would be less complicated. I think including "minor" under definitions will facilitate the understanding of the provisions of the bill.

Also, a comment on fines in place for contravention of provisions in the Amusements Act was mentioned as well. As it stands, any contravention of the provisions or regulations of the act requires the issuance of a \$200 fine. I know we spoke of that earlier, but this is already in the act, and it pertains to every section of the Amusements Amendment Act. I've not chosen to bring forward an amendment to increase that fine because at this time a \$200 fine appears to be adequate to send a clear message to someone who contravenes the act that their actions are unacceptable in our society.

I feel that the video store owners who violate sections of the Amusements Act would be doing so out of ignorance of the law. I don't think they would be doing so simply because they had intentions that were dishonourable but perhaps, as I said, would be ignorant of the law. So those who are simply unaware of the law and how it applies to them will correct their procedures quickly once they are apprised of a nominal fine. Hopefully that will happen, but it's still something that you've raised, which is an important flag, and that we can view in the future as well.

Those who violate the legislation on a regular basis will be subject to the \$200 fine every time they contravene the act and will end up paying much more in fines for the repetitive action, which we know may happen. Such stores will also become known to police, and their reputation will then be affected within the community. So that's why I don't believe it's necessary at this time to increase the fine. It has been adequate to date in ensuring the act is complied with. There hasn't been a complaint in the past about the fine in regards to the Amusements Act as it now stands. But having said that, if it is inadequate in the long term, then at that time it may be necessary to increase it, but that may show just as much for the Amusements Act overall.

Also, since second reading I've discussed the provisions of the bill with the Department of Community Development, which is responsible for the administration of the Amusements Act. Through these discussions I decided to bring forward two amendments which will clarify a definition outlined in the bill and better outline specific responsibilities. These amendments do not, I believe, change the intent of the bill. They simply clarify it and make it more concise. The amendments I understand have been passed out, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, hon. member. The first one is numbered A1.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you. The first is straightforward. Under the definition of adult video it is clearly not only the actual videocassette that we need to refer to. In most cases it's the packaging which will have the labels and images telling the store owner the content of the enclosed video. The first amendment simply adds packaging of a video to the definitions.

The second amendment provides clarification of what types of videos need to be sent to the Film Classification Board for classification. It's the intent of the bill to provide a guideline for video store owners to determine what videos are considered adult videos. Most of these will be labeled in some manner to indicate this, Madam Chairman. However, there will be some containing explicit sex which will require labeling and classification and should be sent to the Film Classification Board for such classification. So that's why section 17.3 is amended and clarifies the process. The amendment also clarifies that it's the responsibility of the video exchange operator to send the video to the Film Classification Board in cases where adult videos are not labeled according to the definition of the act. This was assumed in this section in the tabled bill and is clarified with the amendment.

Section 17.3 still includes the Film Classification Board in the process when a video exchange operator needs clarification on how a video should be labeled. The board was established to provide a professional opinion on film media in the province, and a video exchange operator should have the opportunity, I believe, to call on that experience, if necessary, to classify a video. But Bill 212 is very clear in terms of outlining what circumstances would require the services of the Film Classification Board.

With that I'll close and look forward to comments. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

3:40

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the sponsor of Bill 212 in Committee of the Whole. Bill 212 is the Amusements Amendment Act, 1998.

Thank you very much for responding to my questions. They're getting quite specific on a sort of clause-by-clause basis, but the sponsoring member has clarified those. I take the point on the minors and the definition with an explicit age listed for minors. I still think that at some point we may have to look at a specific fine that is higher than the fine that exists elsewhere. In many cases in other places in the Amusements Act we're dealing with small vendors and kiosks and some things on that level, but I think when we start to get into chain stores that are distributing and renting videos, we're into much larger corporate business, and a \$200 fine may simply be laughable to them. But I take your point that if it's able to be enforced for every video they have violated, every time they do it – yes, indeed the fines may be able to be racked up if that's the interpretation that is taken at the time rather than a \$200 fine per occasion, rather than per instance of violation.

I'd like to respond briefly to amendment A1 that's been put forward. The first section is talking about adding "the videotape's packaging." I'm looking for clarification here. We understand there's the videocassette itself. There is the advertising box that comes with it that's usually displayed on the shelves, and I'm assuming you're looking for the classification labels or stickers to be added to that.

I'm wondering also if there's an intention that the stickers

would be displayed on the take-home cassette box. In my admittedly limited experience in renting videotapes, you are usually sent home from the rental store with a clear plastic or temporary box that is not the one the videotape is usually sold in. It's strictly I think for protection purposes as you carry the videotape home. That might be a bit more interesting, because then we're expecting the vendor to be selecting the appropriate box for the videotape as you rent it, and the number of videotapes that can be going out, if they're on a rental basis, on a Friday night between 5 o'clock and 7 o'clock is a fairly high number. I'm sure there's a way to work through this, but I'm wondering if the member has considered the implementation of it. I'm just wondering if the member had anticipated that and had intended that the sticker also be on the take-home box, for want of a better word. Just a clarification there is what I'm looking for.

I appreciate the reading into the record of the definition of pornography. I think that's important when we're talking about this. As I mentioned before, I don't want to see any of what we would call artistic ventures unfairly dealt with under this legislation, especially in Alberta with our film industry and the struggle we're having right now to keep it and to make it flourish against all odds. I don't want to be doing anything else to discourage them there.

I don't think you would find many who would disagree that any videotape that has a depiction of explicit sex which degrades, dehumanizes, or shows sexual abuse of children – people would want to be alerted to the content of the videotape, and I have no problem with that. I think the point here is that we're dealing with an information factor. We're not censoring people as such. It is up to citizens to choose the product that they wish to rent here. But we are going to a good length, I think, and a fair length just to advise people that this is the content that's available there. We don't call our censorship board a censorship board. We do call them a classification board here. So the point is that we give people information, and they can make up their own minds about what they wish to do with that. I'm much more comfortable with that level of trusting to Albertans a great, good common sense, which I put a great deal of faith in.

That, I think, is the major point that I wanted to make. It's supportive of this amendment, and I urge other members of the Assembly to also support this amendment. In passing, it's a little bit of housekeeping and a little bit of clarification. I think it strengthens the bill, and I'd like to see it pass.

With those few words I'll take my seat. Thank you for the opportunity.

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

MS PAUL: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'll just make a few brief comments with respect to Bill 212, the Amusements Amendment Act, and I would like to compliment the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for bringing it forward. It is very timely. I mean, videos are a sign of the times just as computers are in schools, and I think there has to be stricter regulations with respect to the availability of pornography in videos.

I think, Madam Chairman, this bill certainly addresses some of the concerns that I'm sure lots of parents have experienced when their youngsters come home with a package containing a video that is not appropriate for their age group or for that matter any age group. It should be noted that the Liberal caucus introduced a bill, if I'm correct, in about 1994 with respect to the same

intent. That bill actually included a fine. I think that definitely strengthens the bill and puts a little bit of meat and potatoes in it.

Madam Chairman, the discussion I'm sure has gone on with respect to video regulations and who can acquire or purchase certain videos. Obviously, this has to be addressed through age requirement. I have noted that in the bill the age is that of 18. Well, this definition actually works currently, but if the age of majority ever changed, then unfortunately this legislation would not work. The legislation would have to be reopened and redefined. So I just sort of thought that was interesting, why the age is stipulated, because normally what's done in legislation such as this is that the definition of minor is left up to the Age of Majority Act. I think that sort of encompasses any age, and if the age of majority rises or is lowered – for example, let's say in 30 years it could be 16, it could be 21, whatever – then you just have to reopen. I know it's bookkeeping and that sort of thing, but it was just something that I was wondering.

3:50

I noted certain sections. Section 17.2 is the section which actually prohibits video exchange operators from providing adult videos to minors. The bill that was presented by the Liberal Party in 1994, which I've already indicated, Bill 222, also addressed that issue. I think that at that time, however, it was not even discussed. Also, as I think I've already mentioned, Bill 222 had more meat and potatoes with the fact that it included a fine. I guess I could ask the question: why did the sponsor choose not to have fines for violating this section of the act? I think that type of deterrent is quite effective. When vendors have to start paying fines, it certainly cuts into their revenue. Quite often, if there are no fines, then people just sort of ignore and don't take any legislation or any rules or regulations very seriously. When you think of the horrific videos that are available and of some of the pornography that has been displayed in our stores, it is something that definitely, definitely has to be policed, quote, unquote, and I am certainly in favour of that.

Madam Chairman, I think the bill has a lot of merit. I think it was important for the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross to read into the record the definition of what pornography means. I think it gives a clear understanding of the direction of the bill. It gives clear direction for operators to know exactly what the issues are. I also think that when you start reviewing videos in terms of classification, we also have to look at violence. There are so many videos these days that are loaded with violence: violence against family members, violence against children. I mean, the violence is just continuous. I think there need to be some sort of guidelines, obviously, put on those issues as well.

Madam Chairman, I think those are my comments. I know it's Committee of the Whole. I could go through it section by section, but I chose to sort of do an overview because I was not privy to the discussion before. Also, when I speak of violence, of course I'm including coarse language and very suggestive sexual scenes, maybe not sexual in the context or the definition of pornography, but there are gray areas that also need to be addressed.

Good work, and thank you for bringing it to the House.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize you, Edmonton-Gold Bar, I would just ask if we can remember that we are in Committee of the Whole and that we have had an amendment proposed. Actually we are now speaking on the amendment.

Thank you, Edmonton-Gold Bar. Go ahead.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to the amendment to Bill 212. However, I would like to take the liberty to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for introducing this legislation in the Assembly. My hon. colleague for Edmonton-Mill Creek introduced similar legislation before. As a person who has young children who are now getting to the age where they can go to the video store by themselves, I am very, very grateful for the efforts that have been put forward and the work that she has put into this bill. I would like to thank her on behalf of all the parents in my community for her efforts in drafting this legislation.

Now, we have to talk about packaging. It's very, very important because no matter what the product is in the marketplace, packaging is of a great deal of interest to those who are trying to market the product. Sometimes the packaging can be as eye-catching as the video itself if this is to be displayed. I think this is a very, very good amendment, and if I have an understanding of this correctly, the packaging of the video is very, very important. If we are to, say, go into a video store or a rental place and we are to see movies along the wall, the packaging is the first thing that's going to attract our eye. Adding "videotape's packaging" to the proposed section 17.1(a) is a very, very good idea.

In section 17.3 of this bill, the classification of videotape, we're going to strike out the proposed section, as I understand it, and substitute the following. I think also, Madam Chairman, that this, too, is a very, very good idea. It is an amendment which I will certainly support. As I said before, I support the bill, and this amendment I support because it only strengthens the bill.

The only thing that I have to say in any way that would cause me some reservations about this is the fines. The majority of video store owners now respect the rights of all customers regardless of their age. I must ask about fines and what we would do if someone were to violate this act. How are we going to police this? I do not see anything on this, and perhaps there is another amendment coming forward, Madam Chairman, regarding this:

. . . the videotape's packaging does not bear any form of label, sticker, image or language indicating that the videotape contains depictions of explicit sex.

Now, if we are to go any further with that, if there are to be violations of this, we have to know what is going to actually happen. Are there going to be fines? Is there going to be a letter from perhaps the neighbourhood police station? What is going to be going on?

I shall cede the floor to any of my hon. colleagues from either side of the House, and perhaps my questions can be answered.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I, too, rise to indicate support for this particular amendment but do have a couple of questions with regards to the bill in and of itself, and this is the stage when we would bring up some of those questions.

The point that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar brings up is, I think, a valid point that I would like to have addressed prior to third reading.

Another question that I have is whether there is any requirement for a chart to be put up in the video stores or some explanation that people will have as to the grading in a sense, as it were, of videos. I know that they do that now for movies, so you do see

on some of the video packaging the labeling that says PG or whatever. I always have trouble remembering what those particular things stand for, so I'm wondering if there is going to be any kind of classification code that will be up in the video store so that I as a parent can go in and say that G is this, that PG is whatever.

The third question that I have. I agree that videos containing explicit sex should be put into a separate room. My question is on videos of violence and extreme violence and whether it should not also be ensured that there is grading for that, that there be categories that are explicit, and whether in fact some of the videos that depict extreme violence should also be in a room that's not accessible to minors.

So those are the three specific questions that I have. I notice that the member has written those down, and I look forward to her response.

Thank you.

4:00

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm just going to make a brief response, and then I'll certainly put in writing answers to the questions in more detail.

Just briefly, the packaging and the labeling of the packaging is the advertising packaging, the actual advertising, not the carrier, which is what the video goes into to carry it from the store. That's a good question.

The next question, about the \$200 fine. That's in the Amusements Act, and that fine would be put in place just as it's outlined within the act now. It hasn't changed.

The question about the grading of videos, whether or not there would be a list in the stores. Quite frankly, there should be. That could be placed in regulation. I'm hoping it wouldn't be necessary; hopefully stores would follow through with that. The grading is quite clear. As far as the other laws and the way in which it applies, I would think that the bylaws of the municipalities will address what you had raised as your last point.

Thank you, and with that, I call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just want to make a few comments with regard to the bill that we now have before us as amended. First, I want to commend the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross for bringing this forward.

I do have a couple of criticisms. They're not of the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross but perhaps more of myself. When you look at this bill, it's dealing predominantly with videotapes. We all know that videotapes are sort of on the way out in terms of technology. We have something new called DVDs, digital video disks, which can be every bit as conducive, in fact perhaps even more conducive, to pornography than videotapes. We also have a huge problem with respect to the Internet. I guess I'm disappointed in myself for not being more diligent with the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross to include things like that in this bill.

Every time you talk about pornography on the Internet, you say: oh, well, it's absolutely impossible to control it; you can't

stop it. But I really believe that you can, and it has to start somewhere. There are some countries, in particular in Europe and in Asia, that have taken the initiative to ban pornographic servers. So if Alberta becomes a server-free area with respect to pornography, then perhaps Saskatchewan will do it and perhaps B.C. will do it. Perhaps the rest of the country will do it, and pretty soon you cannot distribute pornography from Internet servers in this country. Perhaps then the United States can do it, and eventually you can restrict it to some very remote and small parts of the world.

Those are just my comments. This is a good start, but certainly I think we'll have to revisit this again with respect to the newer technologies and maybe even have a look at the Internet.

Thank you.

[The clauses of Bill 212 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. Yes. My timing is, I guess, impeccable for once.

I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 212. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

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

Bill 215
Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998

[Debate adjourned April 28: Ms Kryczka speaking]

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 215. I am in support of the principles of this bill with respect to the very serious safety issues and the devastating effects of the many collisions that result from running

red lights at our intersections throughout Alberta. There's probably not a day that goes by without Albertans being maimed or killed as a result of collisions at intersections, with far too many of these happening as a result of running red lights.

But I do have some concerns that stem from the potential erosion of direct enforcement duties of our police officers due to the increased use of electronic surveillance technology as opposed to being stopped and having direct contact with police, with law enforcers. We're all familiar with the use of photoradar in our cities. You might recall that that, too, was supposed to be used in high-risk areas. But many people now believe that photoradar is little more than a cash cow with no deterrent effect because no demerits can be assessed against the owner of the vehicle. I sincerely hope that we're not heading down this same road with these red-light cameras. Photoradar today is now mainly deployed on our freeways, not in our playgrounds and not in our school zones. So, in my view, if you reduce the number of interactions between our citizens and our police, you run the risk of encouraging lawlessness.

I can use some examples. How many more drivers drive without a valid driver's licence because their chances of being stopped by a living, breathing police officer are getting more remote as the use of technology increases? How many drivers drive around without insurance because their chances of being caught are diminished? I've got some friends in the insurance industry, and they tell me that people driving without insurance is increasing dramatically in this province. Why? I'm concerned about that. How many people wanted on warrants get away because technology doesn't check their identity or their record?

4:10

How many impaired drivers drive merrily past photoradar installations without any fear of being pulled over? I did ask the question to the minister actually back in October of 1997, and one of the problems I had was that the minister indicated that those kinds of statistics are not kept. I did get some useful information from our Minister of Justice, and I'll just quote some of the information that I got out of the study that was provided. Between 1992 and 1996 the number of impaired drivers over .08 has moved down from 14,911 in 1992 to 9,911 in 1996. Now, that is tremendous, and I think that that is, you know, a testament to the programs that we have with respect to impaired driving. I certainly hope that the numbers of reductions are not the result of people driving past photoradar installations and not getting caught.

How many people were driving while suspended? Again, the Minister of Justice's information shows that there's been a dramatic reduction: 5,130 per year in 1991, down to 3,302 in 1996. Again a dramatic reduction, and I would hope that's not because we're not stopping them anymore to check them.

Uninsured vehicles. Here there has been, what appears from these statistics, a reduction from 18,531 in 1992 down to 15,952 in 1996. But that's interesting, because my insurance agent friends tell me that that's on the increase. So are they getting away with not being insured because we're not stopping them anymore? Unregistered motor vehicles have actually gone down as well from 19,000 to 18,000.

So there is statistical information that does cause me to have some concern with respect to this information. In my view, nothing works better than a police cruiser with its lights on to deter lawbreakers of every kind. There is no better lesson to be learned than the embarrassment of being pulled over for a moving infraction and being thoroughly checked out by an officer of the law.

Red-light cameras may be another slide down the slippery slope that reduces police interaction in law enforcement. I'd just make this comment for you to think about: some jurisdictions don't even man those cameras anymore with police officers; they use citizens. So, again, fewer and fewer interactions with our police officers.

Where will this slippery slope end? Certainly I know that here we're talking about red-light cameras, and maybe this applies more to photoradar. The concerns that I've just expressed are amplified by the results of a response from the minister, as I indicated. I asked about the number of drivers who were stopped for moving offences and subsequently charged with impaired driving, driving while disqualified, driving with no insurance, driving unregistered vehicles, and evasion of warrants. The point I'm trying to make here, Mr. Speaker, is that therein lies the crux of the problem. It's the accountability of what we're doing. There is no accountability currently, and I would urge the minister to consider making sure that we do in fact put some accountability back into the system. I would like to ask the minister if he could touch on this when he speaks to this bill, which I expect he will do sometime later. The question to the minister is: will he consider reviewing how statistics are gathered with respect to the number of drivers stopped by our police officers throughout Alberta who are found to be impaired, disqualified, with no insurance, and so on?

I believe the minister would be the last person on this side who would want effective, personal interaction with police officers eroded by the use of technology as a substitute for interaction between our citizens and our law enforcement officers. So I respectfully suggest that we must have a way to monitor not only how a program is working but also its effect on the overall success in all of the areas mentioned. I know that the minister is also concerned about this potential of technology erosion, so I trust that he will commit to ensure that he has the necessary information to monitor the overall outcome to be sure that that erosion, that I've been talking about, does not happen.

Now, I don't think that my request for collecting this type of data would be particularly onerous, because as I understand it, every vehicle that is stopped is logged on the police log and the licence number is logged and checked. There's a record of all of that, so it is a matter of asking each police jurisdiction for the information. Perhaps once per quarter might do. This information could also be very useful to the minister as a means of measuring the effectiveness of specific safety campaigns and the relative effectiveness of the various policing jurisdictions across Alberta. If all of that information were available, then we could learn from it.

So with the commitment of the minister to monitor the effect of electronic enforcement on the more traditional and effective person-to-person enforcement, I'll be pleased to vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In reading Bill 215, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act, I concur with the previous speaker on some of the areas of concern that he's having, but I think it's prudent for us in the city of Edmonton at this point to take the automatic red-light photo situation for the areas of concern where it is necessary to have those put in place. I'll tell

you that I have been hit or almost hit a number of times when trying to turn on a green light and people are trying to run the red. I think that if this photoradar sign was put in place like in the county of Strathcona, which was shown in the paper today, whether there's a policeman there or not, there is an indicator that the light is being controlled. Unfortunately, we don't have enough policemen to facilitate all the needs in all the areas where people are running reds. I mean, that's just not possible. We haven't got the manpower; we haven't got the moneys. We just haven't got the money or the manpower, so that is something that is not possible at this time.

I think it's a good private member's bill to be brought forward at this time. I'll tell you that in my constituency people are coming in, and that is one issue or one concern that is being discussed. I think if you go into any of the cities – it's perhaps not quite prevalent in the rural areas – I mean, good heavens, you take your life in your hands when you start driving around. Everybody seems to run a red. I've been told by the police that when you are about to proceed on a green light, when you've got the green light, you should count two thousand one, two thousand two, two thousand three before you advance, because somebody is going to run the red.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, I think the device is necessary. It's very unfortunate that it is so. I think there has to be a rude awakening for citizens in this province. I certainly will be supporting the bill. I don't believe that it is a cash cow or a slippery slope, the cash cow being for the police. I don't believe that has merit or should be part of the discussion. Quite frankly, I don't care if it is. I'm worried about the citizens. I'm worried about the people in Alberta being hit by drivers who do not understand or comprehend or even question: what is a red light? A red light means stop. I think maybe we should start educating again in primary school, go through a whole process where when people do run a red, they have to go to school and sit in a classroom and be taught what red, yellow, and green mean. It is unfortunate that it has come down to this, but that's the way it is.

There seems to be the thought from other members with respect to adding more policemen, but as I've already indicated, that's just not possible. When you drive around the city of Edmonton, when you drive around Calgary, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, whatever, there are a lot of lights, and whether you just look at high-fatality areas – and I'm sure other people can give a lot of statistics. I have not that information with me, and I'm not privy to it and haven't searched it out. But I think that the device is something that should be put in place in high-fatality areas. There has to be some control. The fines, the penalty, should be quite stringent. It has to be implemented.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Photoradar. Surveys done in Ontario and Edmonton have shown that traffic does slow down on roads where similar devices have been used. In other words, since photoradar has had a positive effect and impact on traffic behaviour, so might the red-light photo devices. Madam Speaker, I think that speaks well on its own merit. I mean, there doesn't seem to be much more discussion necessary on that statement.

I have contacted, as I've indicated, the Edmonton city police, and I do believe that the Calgary police department – both strongly support the use of the red-light photo devices. I mean, that in itself speaks volumes. If they're concurring with the use

of that, then who am I as a Member of this Legislative Assembly to disagree with the job that they do in the front line, so to speak?

The Insurance Bureau of Canada supports in general the use of red-light photo devices. There are three reasons why that has been supported. They believe that the threat of this device will help curb the red-light running. So if it is a deterrent on its own merit, then obviously we're going to be saving lives. They also believe that photoradar should be used, especially in high-collision areas. So you have the photoradar, and then you have the red-light device as well.

Their concern is that there is no effect on the driving record of people caught, unlike getting caught by a regular police patrolman, and that is absolutely correct. The former speaker addressed those issues. Unfortunately, with a machine how can you tell if they're intoxicated, whether their driver's licence is current, their insurance is in order, and on and on and on? But as I've also indicated, you can't have policemen at every light. It's very unfortunate, but that's reality. It's not affordable. It's just not something that is going to happen, I don't think, in our time.

With those comments, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Oh, I'm sorry, hon. member. In keeping with what we usually do in the House, I should have looked this way. We did have a speaker here. Would it be all right with you if I acknowledged the hon. Member for St. Albert and came back to you?

MR. MacDONALD: Okay. By all means. Go ahead. Yes.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

There are many good reasons to support this bill, and I would like to speak directly to it. We've heard them in the House today, specifically, and we also heard them the other day when the hon. Member for Redwater introduced it. It is an obvious bill for us to support because it is a very good educational tool. As we all know, we're all engaged in lifelong learning, even if it is on the highways and byways of our fair cities and our countryside. It is also an efficient and very safe use of our resources, efficient because it does not have to be manned at all times, or womaned, or personed, I guess I should say. Therefore, it is an opportunity for us to educate ourselves by virtue of what it is as a deterrent.

The chiefs of police in this province plus many drivers and other traffic safety stakeholders have themselves expressed concern over drivers who run red lights. When I was teaching in Calgary, a fellow colleague on staff was hit, while she was seated shotgun in a car, by someone who ran a red light. To this day she is quite incapacitated. So many of us have those stories of those who have run red lights, and unfortunately we suffer the effects of it.

Collisions which occur in intersections where a driver has run a red light do speak to these horrible and, I daresay and hasten to say, very avoidable tragedies. The intent of this bill is to put in place a mechanism which will help us to avoid those tragedies. The cost in human lives, the cost in emergency response delivery,

and of course the cost in medical care is very high, as we all know. Red lights exist to regulate traffic at high traffic flow areas, so why not target them with a mechanism in order to penalize those who abuse this particular regulation or rule of the road, that we should all well know?

The system ensures that drivers know when they can proceed safely through an intersection. If we have this deterrent, we will be a lot more conscious of what we do at the intersection. For many of us who spend so many hours in our cars, driving becomes almost an automatic occupation, and we become easily distracted. However, when we know that these cameras are there, we will certainly be a little more conscious of what will take place.

For drivers who do not heed the lights or try to run the red lights, they run the risk of causing a serious collision, as we know, not only with another vehicle but perhaps with pedestrians. In many cases in fact it is both vehicles and pedestrians, and the tragic effects are multiplied.

Also, this means stating the obvious, but we need to remind drivers that red lights do exist. Sometimes we are so preoccupied with our thoughts that often in the automatic process of driving, if you will, we forget that red lights are there and red lights mean stop and the yellow ones are very cautionary. We could take the straight educational approach and just send out a message, but by placing and enforcing this red-light camera, it gives us a financial reason to take notice. When something hits us in the pocketbook, we tend to feel it. If we're going to get dinged with a fine, then we tend to pay a lot more attention, sad as that comment may be.

It also gives police forces a greater reach, because it is a camera that they don't have to continue to be present to operate. It reaches out further to the law enforcement, if you will. It does also take a lot of resources for police to witness and to apprehend every driver who runs a red light at every intersection, and this just facilitates and expedites the whole process of catching red-light runners. There is also a safety risk to drivers, pedestrians, and officers, especially in high-risk, busy intersections. So this, again, is an objective and certainly a mechanism that can take the place of individuals who would be trying to enforce them.

4:30

I would say, Madam Speaker, that most drivers of course are aware that they should not be running these lights, but again I will reiterate the fact that anything that is around to remind us of what we should do in respect for our fellow drivers or pedestrians and indeed fellow human beings is a good thing. This legislation reminds everyone that we as a society feel – and we therefore have this in place – that people should not be running red lights. Again, we're stating the obvious, but sometimes it takes a little bit of jogging of our memory.

Bill 215 fits well with the approach to traffic safety that Alberta Transportation and Utilities has taken. The majority of drivers are not bad drivers, when you think of the thousands upon thousands of people who drive back and forth to work and from A to B and B to C safely every day, but drivers do need to be reminded about the rules of the road. We become very aware of them, obviously, when we are learning to drive, and then if you've had your children go through the driver ed course, you are reminded of a whole lot of rules that you forgot about. However, these again are reminders to us that running red lights is a wrong traffic procedure.

This bill also helps to focus conventional policing activities in areas where it is the most useful and the most efficient. Many of us, I think, have made the comment or at least thought at one time

if we have been stopped or if we've seen a police officer giving a traffic ticket – and we either say it under our breath or think it – that his or her time could be better spent catching criminals than giving us a ticket. This is a mechanism, an object which will record an offence and does not require the person power of the police force.

Installing red-light cameras reduces the amount of violations at an intersection, especially when accompanied by an educational campaign. Awareness kicks us into action. In Victoria, B.C., there was a 75 percent reduction in violations in their 1992 pilot program, and 75 percent is nothing to be sneezed at. Certainly if we feel that those infractions can be reduced by that amount, then I think it's ample justification for the approval of this bill. In Los Angeles their pilot program saw an even greater decrease, an 84 percent reduction, in violations of running red lights.

These numbers, Madam Speaker, are significant when you consider that the violation has a direct relationship with the number of collisions which occur as a result. It's one thing to go through a yellow or amber light, but when one goes through a red light – the expectation of every other driver on the road is that if they are going across the intersection, they have the right of way. This is a clear and demonstrated offence against the traffic laws.

So in summary, Madam Speaker, I would just like to urge everyone in this Assembly to vote in favour of this bill sponsored by the Member for Redwater. It is something that's preventive. It's something that alerts us all, and it certainly has justification in its pilot projects.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and thank you, hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to say a few words regarding Bill 215. This bill is going to introduce the use of red-light traffic enforcement devices in Alberta, which may help to curb red-light running by motorists.

Now, I saw in the news last night or maybe the night before that there's going to be a test pilot project go on in Sherwood Park. I was led to believe by the police officer that was interviewed in this newscast that every time the light changes, there is at least one violation. The red light is on; the driver will turn left into traffic. That happens every time the lights change. This is a frightening thing. This is an issue of public safety, and we have to think of public safety, but we also have to think of George Orwell and the Orwellian nature of these devices at every traffic light in the province.

There are certainly going to be many cases where there are going to be violations of the Highway Traffic Act, and I can only assume that the fines that are going to be levied for people who violate this are going to be governed by the Highway Traffic Act. It is still not clear to me whether it's going to be the registered owner of the vehicle or the driver of the vehicle who is going to actually receive the fine in the mail. I am very curious, and as this debate progresses, if the hon. Member for Redwater could please clarify for me exactly who is going to receive in the mail this fine. Is it going to be the registered owner of the vehicle, or is it going to be the driver of the vehicle? I am very interested in that.

I noticed also, Madam Speaker, that where this experiment is taking place, where the signage is to indicate the light, on the green portion there is a camera. There is a symbol of a camera there. In respect to the Orwellian nature of this, if there is to be

a restriction on the use of these devices, perhaps we could do what the environment department has done in regards to poachers, and that's to have a symbolic moose or an elk positioned somewhere where the shooters drive by. They're not supposed to shoot from their vehicles, but they take a shot anyway. Perhaps instead of installing so many cameras, the hon. member across the way could employ some of those signs that are involved in the experiment. Perhaps we should go to Calgary with them, not put the light up but just put the sign up and see if we can change the traffic habits of the drivers there and just see how much of a deterrence . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: A placebo.

MR. MacDONALD: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has a word for this, "placebo," which is quite interesting.

I think it's a thought that should be pursued further because there is certainly a deterrent here, and I will be looking forward to his comments regarding this, Madam Speaker.

Now, we get further along here and we see the number of violations that the police tell us can occur at one light. We get the idea of how much revenue can be generated with this. There are people – we hear them all the time – who talk about photo-radar. I know it's a totally different thing, but there is a perception that police forces use it as a means of revenue generation. Now, we all know that there have been cutbacks. There's been downloading by this provincial government onto the backs of municipalities, and we know how that's affected police forces and their budgeting. It's only natural for the police forces to look for other sources of revenue. If this is going to be used as a source of revenue under the guise of public safety, then I have some questions about this.

4:40

Madam Speaker, the device itself, this red-light traffic enforcement device – in the course of this debate I understand there's going to be an amendment here to the Highway Traffic Act. We're going to determine the qualifications. It's very, very important, because this is a sophisticated electronic device. Who is to test this device? It's going to be a qualified person. Are they going to be qualified by the manufacturer of this device? Are they going to be qualified by the minister? Are they going to be qualified by some obscure regulation which is going to come forward? The calibration of this instrument is very, very important. We need this cleared up here in the course of this discussion: who is going to take this person, he or she, and give them qualifications?

I would like to know more about the manufacturing of this device. Is it one exclusive manufacturer of this device? Are there several? Are they Canadian? Are they American? Are they Japanese? Are we going to purchase these devices exclusively from one supplier, or is it going to be from a number of sources? How do they work in Alberta's extreme winter climate? I am assuming that the testing that's going on in Sherwood Park is going to answer a lot of the questions related to this. It will be very, very interesting in a year's time to hear from the hon. member as to how his test has gone.

Now, Madam Speaker, in regard to the changes in the Highway Traffic Act and the Lieutenant Governor in Council making regulations "respecting the requirements and use of red light traffic enforcement devices," I would like to caution this House. We all talk about government and how it intrudes into our lives. I'm sure each and every one of the hon. members in this House

has in the course of their education become quite familiar with George Orwell and his novels. We must be very, very careful about intruding into people's lives. There is a delicate balance between public safety, safety on our streets and on our highways, and the fact that people may feel that they're being spied on.

With those remarks, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat. Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me a great deal of honour to rise today to speak to Bill 215. I would also like to commend the hon. Member for Redwater for bringing this particular bill forward. This does have some bearing on the hon. member and myself and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, as we share 97th Street between Edmonton-Castle Downs to the west of Edmonton-Glenarry and the constituency of Redwater to the north. I know quite often the member travels in on highway 28, which turns into 97th Street at the city limits.

Not too far inside the city limits, Madam Speaker, we have an intersection between 97th Street and 137th Avenue where there is a tremendously high volume of traffic. This is compounded because we do have Edmonton garrison, part of it, situated on one of the corners. On the opposite corner we have a very busy bus terminal, that serves all of northeast Edmonton. It is a major north/south traffic area; it's also a major east/west traffic area. So it is not uncommon to see at this intersection many accidents in the course of a week. Of course, because highway 28 turns into 97th Street, the traffic that is coming in off the highway on many occasions does not observe the speed limit, and this intersection comes upon them very quickly. So when these collisions do occur in this intersection, they are usually quite serious. Certainly deaths have been encountered at this intersection as well as many injuries that people feel the effects of for the rest of their lives.

This bill, Bill 215, which would allow for the red-light traffic enforcement device, is an extremely good bill, particularly when I think of this intersection. I'm sure, in speaking with the member, that this is exactly the type of intersection where we'd want to put one of these devices. It's certainly not a cash cow. It's certainly a type of instrument which will benefit all people who are using that particular intersection.

As well, Madam Speaker, there are many other good reasons why we would like this sort of device put at this particular intersection. One of those of course is that in northeast Edmonton in particular we do have areas that have a very high crime rate. Our police in that particular end of the city have many, many different areas to get involved with, so as far as their having enough time to police this one particular busy intersection, it would be extremely difficult. So by installing a device of this nature, it would certainly free them up to do the many other jobs that they do have in this area. Just in this particular area we have two high schools; we have numerous junior high schools. We have shopping centres on three corners. There are many, many different problems as well as the intersection itself.

In my own family I have three children that drive, and one of them in particular had to test out the photoradar on a few occasions. Certainly he got his fine in the mail and had to pay it. I can honestly say that after three or four occasions this person is now not getting those letters in the mail, and he is using his money for other things. I didn't want to say it was my son, but we'll let that go for now.

Another problem when we do speak about this particular

intersection: because of the incredible amount of high-volume traffic, it prohibits enforcement at that particular intersection. In order to police that intersection properly, we would have to have one police car for north and south of 97th Street and east and west of 137th Avenue. This again would lead to a secondary problem, and that would be the gawkers that have to look at somebody receiving their ticket. How many times have all of us seen, when police are investigating an accident, that a second accident takes place because somebody has not paid particular attention to what they were doing? So I would have to say that a device of this nature, which does not interrupt the flow of traffic – and it's traffic which is constantly increasing in that area – is certainly a much safer way to police that intersection than what is there.

4:50

I also think what this bill allows – and again I want to compliment the Member for Redwater for bringing it forward. The way the police are doing business today certainly is changing rapidly because of technology, and it does do this much more efficiently than any police officer could, just as our photoradar certainly is much more efficient at catching speeders on the highway than a single police officer out there with a radar gun. So it is much more efficient, and as people start paying those fines and the word gets out that this is working, then certainly they will know which intersections it's at, and it will alter their behaviour. They will respect the red lights; they will not be running them. The frequency of accidents will certainly be less. Of course the ultimate goal is that we will have a much safer intersection and one where the various taxes on our society will be much less, whether it be injuries, and as a result our hospital system will not be having to do this, whether it be the police that have to come and investigate the accidents, whether it's the ambulance system that comes to take the injured to the hospital, whatever. So I do think that this device will be certainly a great benefit.

As well, another reason I like this device rather than a police officer there is that if you're that person who's trying to get to work on time and the day hasn't started well and you're running a little late and all of a sudden you get pulled over by a police officer, there's definitely going to be conflict. When we can remove people from this confrontation with the police, then I think it certainly is a much better situation not only for the police but for the citizens that do get involved in this situation.

As well, Madam Speaker, another great advantage in mailing out the fines to people is that they can mail in those fines. They certainly aren't tying up the courts if they can't or whatever. Again, just a win/win situation for everybody.

I can also identify and appreciate the frustration that those people caught going through a particular intersection would feel, particularly when this ticket comes, for example, two to three weeks later or whatever. I think that what this also does, though, is that it is going to make the owner of those vehicles much more responsible. In the majority of cases it will be one of them or a family member who would be driving that vehicle. In the case of a business the employer in that business certainly wouldn't have any difficulty tracing his records and finding out who was driving at that particular time. So the ultimate result is that people will be identified even if they aren't the people paying the fine or whatever, and these Big Brother fears that we have will certainly be reduced once these devices are put in place.

What I also like about this particular bill, Madam Speaker, is that it will provide continuous surveillance if that is required. Now, again, we know that not only at peak periods of traffic do these accidents occur. Many of these occur as well in the wee

hours of the morning, when people that are driving perhaps are not paying as much attention as they should. I would think, you know, that when we have those light traffic volumes yet still dangerous intersections, people certainly will be more cautious if they do know that there is continual surveillance at a particular intersection.

So I feel that these devices, Madam Speaker, will greatly assist in the decrease in the occurrence of people running red lights. The accidents that are occurring now are definitely preventable. This will be one means that we can use for preventing those accidents or, if not preventing them, certainly decreasing them to a great extent. It does place the ultimate responsibility for that vehicle upon the owner, whether it be family members, friends, or employees driving it. Certainly that is where we would like to get to most.

So I would urge all members of the Assembly to support Bill 215. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MS LEIBOVICI: I, too, wish to just say a few words to this particular bill. I believe that the concept is sound, but I do have some questions and, I guess, concerns. In my constituency I have the privilege, if you want to call it that, of having one of the highest traffic corner areas in the city of Edmonton with the most accidents. That happens to be 87th Avenue and 170th Street, right where West Edmonton Mall is, and as you can imagine, the traffic there is continuous around the clock. Because of people either wanting to rush home or rush out of town or to get onto the Whitemud or not being sure, because they are tourists, of the exact location and where they turn and where they don't turn, it appears to be an area where the accidents are definitely above average and above the norm. Then I have either the second or third highest traffic area, a number of accidents at another corner which is just down the block. So the intent of the bill, if it is to try and ensure that the number of traffic accidents is lessened, I believe is sound, as I indicated.

My understanding – and I would appreciate the member informing us of this – is that one of the reasons that we need to put it into the Highway Traffic Act as opposed to using section 8(k) of the act, that says, “prescribing and requiring the use of devices and other means to prevent accidents or thefts of motor vehicles,” which could in fact be the red-light traffic enforcement device, is that we need to have it specified, because if we specify it, that means that you don't have to have a police officer present as the picture is being taken. I would like clarification, because it doesn't say that in here, and I'm not sure, again, if the intent was to allow for the device to be there without the presence of a police officer, if this in fact is going to cover that off. If it is going to cover it off, I'd like to know why it would just by putting it in here.

The other piece of information that I need to know is: how exactly does the device work? My understanding is that it's almost as if there's an infrared light, so it only becomes activated when the light actually turns red. So it's not a question of a yellow when being in the intersection or being halfway through when it's yellow and it then turns red. I understand that the Sherwood Park experiment is indicating that about one in three cars actually runs the red, which I find extremely hard to believe, but I have no reason not to believe it, unless those in Sherwood Park are more prone to run reds than the law-abiding citizens of Edmonton. I'd just like to know how that actually works.

5:00

The issue of demerit points. As someone was indicating to me a little bit earlier, what happens in Britain with the demerit points

in fact is that if the registered owner does not produce the individual that is driving the car, they then get the demerit points. So the onus is on the individual who owns the car to indicate who the person is who committed the offence, and if they're not willing to do that, then they have the demerit points. I think that if we're looking at the red lights having an effect, then the demerit point issue needs to be addressed as well, and that can also be addressed perhaps at the same time as the whole issue of photoradar. At that point it might not become a cash issue only, but if it's a demerit issue, then people may take it a little bit more seriously.

I don't have as much of a problem with the idea of photoradar and the argument being that it is a cash cow, because the only reason it can be a cash cow is if you're breaking the law. So if you're breaking the law, there should in fact be some kind of disincentive to doing that. That, to my mind, is the same with the red-light traffic enforcement device. If in fact you're breaking the law, then there should be a disincentive to that, whether it's through demerits, whether it's through the fines system.

It's unfortunate, however, that we've come to a state in terms of our policing where we need to rely solely on mechanical devices, because the reality is that the best type of enforcement most likely is to have a police officer there who can then also see whether you're capable of driving, whether you have a current driver's licence and should be driving, whether you're intoxicated. The list goes on as to what a human being can see as opposed to a piece of machinery. I have a little bit of uneasiness with that bit of it, that because of cutbacks, because of a large number of issues, we've come to rely on machinery to do work that, I believe, can be in some respects better done by having a human being there. I understand there are tradeoffs as well that have to occur and that police officers' time is also better spent on situations that require their intervention. There is that tradeoff occurring as well – and I don't think we should lose sight of that – because of the cutbacks that have happened to the police forces throughout the province. That's one of the reasons that we are looking at machinery, and I would not agree with machinery replacing humans in a wide variety of situations when it comes to policing.

Those are basically my comments, and I look forward to the member's explanation to my concerns.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 215 read a second time]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders**
head: **Committee of the Whole**
head: *(continued)*

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Bill 213
School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First off I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for his

comments the other day and for his assessment. All I'm trying to do with this bill is bring an awareness of the importance of computerization and technology for the future of education and students in this province. As he alluded to, the minister in fact already does have the authority within the School Act to prescribe courses of study for educational programs including the amount of instruction time, authorized courses of study, and materials within schools, et cetera. But what I'm trying to achieve here is that special recognition and importance will be given to technology and computerization, particularly so it can be integrated within the school system and within the core subjects that students are now taking.

A lot of what I'm trying to achieve is a further endorsement and expansion of the document that was worked on by two MLAs, one being certainly the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont and also the hon. member across the way from Calgary-Montrose, who spent considerable time bringing forward Framework for Technology Integration in Education. A number of their recommendations have, in fact, been implemented now, and a number are still being looked at and will be incorporated as we move ahead with computerization and technology.

It is very, very important, after talking to some members of the department, that we look at the end result, what we want students to achieve, rather than the prescribed standardized course. I'm asking that we can bring forward an amendment that will look more at the results, what will be achieved, in fact, as we work through a lot of the recommendations that were part of this technology framework and see what the end result will be. I think in any given area it's always the end result that is important. I'm not going to, for the sake of time, spend a whole lot more time discussing this, but I will pass out the amendment and would ask you to look at it, and we'll go from there.

The hon. minister has certainly agreed to this bill and has supported it, particularly with the amendment, because the department is presently working on an integrated approach and an approach that is results oriented. In the amendment I'm asking that we delete prescribed standardized "courses of study in" computer technology and instead put: prescribed standardized "objectives for the study of" computer technology. So I will just wait until they are handed out.

As I said, the minister and I have spent some time discussing this, and he certainly agrees with the basic intent behind this bill. I do know that I feel very strongly about this, because this bill is a direct result of two particular school boards in my area and some thorough discussion, particularly on the eastern side, about technology and the need to have a provincewide integration process involved in ensuring that we continue to support what school boards are doing and what is needed for students in the future.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I will sit down, because I'm sure that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods will want to speak to this. I do note that he did say:

So given that that's the intent, we would probably support this bill but urge that it be dealt with quickly and moved through the House.

With that, I move the amendment.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler has moved an amendment to Bill 213, School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998, and we will refer to this as amendment A1.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

5:10

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We do support the amendment. We do support my previous comment that we'd like to see this moved through the House quickly. So I'd like to indicate that I'll be the only one speaking from this side of the House on the amendment.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to very quickly say that I, too, am in support of the amendment simply because what it does most specifically is allow for the integration of the computer technology learning process with the education process. So that's the strength of it. I appreciate the amendment, and I think we should give it our full approval.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

[The clauses of Bill 213 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Oh, yeah. I move that committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports Bill 213 with some amendments. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

Bill 212
Amusements Amendment Act, 1998

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of the Amusements Amendment Act, 1998, today.

As we said earlier in the Legislature, the bill is a simple amendment to the Amusements Act which will establish a clear and practical framework to restrict minors from accessing pornographic videos. It goes no further than necessary, Mr. Speaker, and I believe it will provide the security to parents and the community that children will not be able to access pornography available on video tapes.

Bill 212 is a good piece of legislation, but I also want to emphasize that it has strong community and municipal support which I hope you'll be able to support in third reading today.

With that, I move third reading.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to support this bill in third reading. In conversation with some of my colleagues a question has come up, and it's a point of clarification if I can just put it forward to you. I apologize for the lateness of this. The question is: is the classification that's being used the classification that's already in existence and used by the Alberta film classification service? That means that what we're talking about really is classifying them all as the A classification, adult? She's nodding her head. Maybe she'll have a chance to respond to me in closing the debate. Because that then entitles a fair number of videos. You're looking at a cost factor for some video rental business owners in having to put aside a room that's large enough to contain all the videos they might have that would be classified as adult. Again, I don't have a problem with that, but just for a point of clarification and to get it onto the record, if that question could be answered.

The second thing I wanted to raise again, and perhaps this is something to look to in the future, is that this classification and the purpose of Bill 212 is to deal specifically with sexually explicit videotapes. Once again I raise the point that we still, as a society, seem to place great harm in any kind of sexual explicitness, and I would support that, but we don't do anything about violence. So the example that I've used previously is that we could have someone eviscerated on film, and as long as they're wearing clothes when they're eviscerated, this is acceptable.

I think this is something that we need to look to unless the sponsoring member is under the impression that extreme violence would also be included under this. But everything else we've been talking about has been sexually explicit. The film classification under the A category again is talking about predominantly sexually explicit activity, but the R classification is dealing with sexual activity, brutal or graphic violence, intense horror, or other disturbing content. So a suggestion for us to be working on in the future, or perhaps this is read into this. I'm just looking for clarification.

Again, I agree with the member that this is a very simple bill. It's almost but not quite housekeeping in that it is looking to add something new to what we're doing. I've had no business owners contacting me and saying this is a hardship for us. I think, in fact, that it probably works to the advantage of video store owners in that it clarifies what their position and what their responsibilities are. We already know there's a number of business owners that specialize in adult videos, and that's very clear from the outside of their store, and the other ones shouldn't have a problem.

Again, I'm being asked a question about why the member was talking about putting it into the bylaws when she was asked a previous question.

So those are just some little points of clarification that I'd like to get answered if I can. I am supportive of the bill and would like to see it pass third reading, and I'm sure at this point that it will. With those few comments I will take my seat and allow my hon. colleague to end the debate.

5:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross to close debate on Bill 212.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will commit to the hon. member to obtain the classification list as it now stands. I'm sorry. I apologize that I do not have that with me. Oh, you have it right now? So you know, if you . . . I will take that under advisement. I apologize. I don't have the list with me. I know there's been a change in regulations to include a classification where films are not and would not be available to minors, to those under the age of 18. I reviewed that very closely, actually, when I did see that, but that was about three or four months ago. So I'll undertake to look at this that you do have and speak with you further about that.

With that I'll move third reading. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 212 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to seek unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 73(1) regarding bills receiving three separate readings on different days before being passed, with respect to the hon. Member for Lacombe's Bill 213, if I'm not mistaken. Just so we can deal with third reading.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Orders in order for Bill 213, School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998, to be read a third time.

All those in agreement with this motion, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Those opposed, please say no.

You have your unanimous consent, hon. member.

Hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Bill 213

School (Computer Instruction) Amendment Act, 1998

MRS. GORDON: I would like to move, Mr. Speaker, third reading of Bill 213. I wish to thank the Assembly for supporting this bill, and in particular I want to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods and his colleagues.

With the haste that he talked about both in second reading and Committee of the Whole, I would ask that everyone support third reading of Bill 213.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 213 read a third time]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move the

Assembly do now stand adjourned until 8 p.m. this evening and reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that the Assembly do now adjourn until 8 p.m. this evening. When we next meet, it will be in Committee of the Whole.

All those in support 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: Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]