

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 17, 1998**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/11/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

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

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of 623 Albertans asking the government to 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.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two different petitions to table today. One is from 26 members of the Spruce Grove Chamber of Commerce urging the Alberta government

to consult extensively with Albertans on the ramifications of not properly fixing the CPP, including the option of an Alberta managed, Mandatory Retirement Savings Plan should the federal government not commit to properly fixing the CPP well in advance of the next scheduled review in 2001.

My second petition, signed by 190 people, urges the government to amend the Workers' Compensation 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 SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present. In fact, they have what appears to be identical wording. The first is signed by 999 Albertans urging that we stop passage of Bill 37, and the second petition is to exactly the same effect signed by 21 Albertans in Onaway and other communities in northern Alberta.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present petitions from some 500 Albertans ranging from Entwistle to Vulcan and Spruce Grove, all across the province, again urging the government to

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.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a petition signed by 3,758 Edmontonians, some of whom live in the neighborhoods of Holyrood, Idylwyld, Kenilworth, Ottewell, Terrace Heights, and Forest Heights. Their petition is urging the city of Edmonton to keep the east leg of the proposed inner ring road at highway 14 and 17th Street.

Thank you.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I, too, would like to submit the petition of 457 residents of Alberta right from Calgary to Edmonton to Red Deer. The petition they have signed is to urge the government

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.

Thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly. It's signed by 199 Albertans from areas such as Calgary, Airdrie, Carstairs, and it urges 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.

Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, the petition I'd like to present today is signed by 201 Albertans similarly calling for changes to the Workers' Compensation Act and for ultimately fair recompensation to the disenfranchised widows, as they call themselves.

Thank you.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a petition on behalf of the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake which was signed by 44 people in her constituency who are opposed to Bill 37.

head: **Notices of Motions**

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions and motions for returns stand in their places on the Order Paper.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: There's a long list here this afternoon, hon. members.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of the prisoner voting report entitled Promoting Responsible Citizenship. This report has been submitted by an MLA committee making recommendations on restrictions on prisoner voting under the Alberta Election Act.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister . . . Oh, sorry. Please proceed, Government House Leader. Do you have another one?

MR. HAVELOCK: No. I was just slow sitting down, Mr. Speaker. Sorry.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to file with the Assembly an information bulletin and nomination forms for the second annual minister's seniors' service awards. These awards are presented during Senior Citizens' Week to individual seniors and seniors' organizations who have demonstrated excellence in serving Alberta's seniors.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file copies of a letter I have sent today to the Calgary Stampeder Football Club wishing them the best of luck in the upcoming Grey Cup final.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly today five copies of responses to written questions 17 and 18 and to motions for returns 21, 22, and 23.

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of a report conducted by the Alberta Science and Research Authority for the government entitled A Strategy for Information & Communications Technology in Alberta. The report details the state of the ICT industry globally, in Canada, and in Alberta. It was released last Thursday by a high-speed fibre optic link between the University of Calgary and the university in Edmonton. As well, being concerned about costs, we released the report in the form of a CD, which was cost effective but also utilizes a very creative medium. It's my understanding that this is the first time a report has been tabled in terms of a CD in this House, and I'm pleased to table it in that form.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, I do appreciate the emergence of high technology into the Assembly. The difficulty is that technology will change so dramatically that I would also ask that you provide a hard copy of the text as well. What's to suggest that a year from now or two years from now the instrument that you tabled today will not become similar to the old 78 or 33 or 45? At that point in time the hon. citizens of the province will be unable . . . So perhaps you might follow through with the hard copy as well.

DR. TAYLOR: I will do that Mr. Speaker, and I do remember what you were talking about. I do remember 78s.

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

DR. OBERG: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the document entitled In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues. It is a vision paper that has been put out by the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for social services. I've also included a letter entitled Focusing on Ability Rather than Disability.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to table the necessary documents in response to Motion for a Return 15 agreed to by this Assembly on March 4, 1998.

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

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In hard copy I'm pleased to be able to table this afternoon four copies of the '97-98 annual report of the Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists. This report details some of the activities and initiatives undertaken during the past year, initiatives which ensure excellence and competence in occupational therapy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This summer thousands of individuals signed Keep Arts Festivals Alive in Alberta cards, and I would like to table a small fraction of those cards today. I table five copies of more than 250 cards.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table copies of relevant correspondence and sections of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee Act citing the processes and inconsistencies with respect to the investigations of deaths and critical incidents in social care facilities in the province.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. Firstly, copies of a provincial survey of patient charges for cataract surgery plus details of complaints being filed by the CACA with the Minister of Health and the College of Physicians and Surgeons; also three separate E-mail messages I've received from Albertans concerned about Bill 37, sir.

Thank you.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of 77 letters from the parents of Meyokumin school and the Meyokumin school council who are very disappointed with the unfavourable way the Alberta government is funding public education. They want the government to increase its funding to public education at no less than the rate of inflation. The original copies will go to the appropriate minister.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter dated July 4, 1997, from Forintek Canada Corp. to the Department of Labour recommending that pressure treatment for shakes from species with a nondurable heartwood be utilized.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly students and their teachers from J.A. Fife school: Ms Christie Mjolsness, a former member

of this Assembly, and also Mr. Henry Taschuk. They are in the public gallery, and with your permission I ask that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My next introduction, Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly is a number of members of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. They are in the members' gallery, and with your permission I ask that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to introduce to you today and through you to members of the Assembly two young ladies. One is Jen Sutherland from around Red Deer, and the other is Kylie Sheppard, who actually is visiting Canada from Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, and is in Canada on a one-year working visa. We're pleased to have them join us. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the House.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce my first class in the Assembly as the Leader of the Opposition. They are 25 students and two adults from the Lymburn elementary school. The teacher, Mrs. Brenda Basiga, and Mrs. Susan Cunningham have joined us in the Legislature today. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce two groups. The first is 42 students from Wild Rose elementary school in St. Albert. I'd like to introduce them to you and through you to members of the Assembly. They are here in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce six members of the Friends of Leyla Zana Society. Leyla, a duly elected member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, is a political prisoner there. The six members in the public gallery today are Mary Trempener, Saren Azer, Lynn Forster, Ekrem Kolay, Hanife Kolay, and Allan Dane. I'll ask the visitors to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

MRS. O'NEILL: It's my pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. and Mrs. Lu Duigou, who are residents of St. Albert. They are in the visitors' gallery this afternoon, and I would ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce a number of women who belong to the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. They're seated in the public gallery: Marlene Morrie, Joyce Baird, Fern Barnay, Marjarete Bates, Ivy Piffer, Muriel Johnson, Jeff Johnson, Jeanette Ennis, Colleen Dorbisser, John Dorbisser, Pauline Knutte, Bob Elquist, Margorette Leonard, Leslie Leonard, Carol Ross, Mary-Ann Charbonneau, Mary Neigel, Diana Leitch, and Ruth Cyr. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for St. Albert, you have a third introduction?

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, I failed to mention two teachers and three parents who were accompanying the students from Wild Rose elementary school. They are Mrs. LaBuick, Mr. Power, Mrs. Hubbard, Mrs. Erickson, and Mr. Smith, and I would ask them to please stand and receive the welcome of the Assembly.

head:

Oral Question Period

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, in 1994 the Premier said that he supported kicking the doors wide open to private health care, and in fact government policy supports private clinics. Now we find that private clinics are the subject of a formal complaint. Will the Minister of Health ensure that not one more dollar of public money goes to these private clinics until a full review of the alleged questionable and unethical practices is completed?

MR. JONSON: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, as I remember it, the Leader of the Official Opposition made some very – what shall we say? – clear comments about her recognition of the place that private health care had within the health care system of Alberta at that time. I'll be happy to elaborate more fully on that at a suitable opportunity.

In answer to the question, first of all, it is my understanding that the Consumers Association of Canada has certainly raised a very, very important issue which bears investigation. I would also like to point out, though, Mr. Speaker, that the allegation of overcharging for certain devices, in this case lenses for eyes, was attributed to both physicians working in the public system as well as those who are working under contract to regional health authorities.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is it still the policy of this government, as stated by the former Provincial Treasurer, that hospitals should be built, owned, and operated by private businesses?

1:50

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I do not remember such a policy ever being part of this government's direction. In fact I'm sure it's never been a part of government's overall direction. An individual in this House may have expressed a particular point of view at some point in time.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hospital facilities in this province currently, certainly our acute care hospitals are constructed through Public Works, Supply and Services under government mandate.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I'll table a reminder to him.

Really isn't this minister's and this government's proposed private health policy simply following up on the Premier's order to kick open these doors to private, for-profit health care?

MR. JONSON: As was clearly stated in the debate on the bill which is before the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, the intention of Bill 37 is to protect the public health care system of this province, to follow the principles of the Canada Health Act, which the members across the way should have some affinity for, but certainly this government does support those principles. That is the intention of this legislation.

Treasury Branches

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the provincial Treasurer. What is Project Chinook?

MR. DAY: I'll wait for the answer from her, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, isn't it really a marketing study towards a communications plan on the privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches?

MR. DAY: That's news to me. I haven't heard this particular term.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'll table the document to refresh his memory and ask: when this Treasurer has a chance to break the mold, why doesn't he just stop sneaking around and tell Albertans what's on his mind with respect to privatization of the Treasury Branches?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I had hoped that the member opposite wouldn't be taking the same tack as the former leader in, I think, introducing an element of debate, which personally I think is beneath her, with these types of suggestions: "sneaking around." Sneaking around?

Mr. Speaker, I have always been very open related to Treasury Branches, the fact that this is an excellent organization, an asset which is strong and which is earning profits. I have been very open at all times that this government is looking at all the possible options that might be available to make sure that this particular entity would continue to be strong, would continue to show the earnings that it has. I really don't think it dignifies her new office to be asking questions with such a demeaning approach and suggesting, as a matter of fact, that anybody is sneaking around. I just think that's rather shameful.

MR. SAPERS: In the memo on Canadian Facts letterhead which was signed by the CEO of the Alberta Treasury Branch, it reads:

Minister

We are doing focus groups . . . along the lines [mentioned] here.

Aim is: determine public sentiment (impact) of change of status.

What would happen to our customer base [et cetera, et cetera]

Regards. P.S. Welcome back!

Addressed to the Treasurer, January 12, 1998. Mr. Treasurer, would you please explain what alternatives for the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch its president was referring to in that January 12, 1998, memo to you?

MR. DAY: No. You can ask the president anything you want, hon. member. I can tell you the options that are being discussed not only by Treasury Branches but in fact by the public. The options are many. One option that must be considered at all times is the status quo, the organization as it is. That's an option that's being considered.

There have also been options considered related to a sale of Treasury Branches. That's something that is out there and has been probably for 60 years as people have contemplated the possible future of Treasury Branches. We've openly discussed the option of an initial public offering, going to the market.

The main consideration here, Mr. Speaker, is that this organization, which is a very strong one, needs to be kept strong, and everything that is being considered needs to be considered in the context of the reality of the markets that are there now, the fact that the large banks are trying to position themselves to merge into giant organizations. There's been some suggestion that as that happens, this could, in fact, hurt customer services, especially on regional operations. I don't know if that would be a fact, but that implication alone, the implication of merger, suggests that there are some

wonderful opportunities for niche operations related to financial institutions that might mean a western-based banking organization of some kind.

All of these options are out there and are being looked at, and that is quite an open process. As I understand it, Mr. Speaker, Treasury Branches themselves, quite rightly, are surveying and have been surveying their own client base to see how their clients feel about various options that may be presented to Treasury Branches and also how they feel about concerns that are related and are out there being discussed: West Edmonton Mall, some of the court cases. They are, as a responsible organization, constantly going to their customer base to get reaction and get guidance, and I don't see anything untoward about that at all. I'm glad that they're doing that and I hope they continue.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, if a government decision to privatize the Alberta Treasury Branch has in fact not been made, then to what does the president of the Alberta Treasury Branch refer when he says that Project Chinook will determine public sentiment towards a change in status. What does he know that you're not telling us?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to decide if this is a trick question. Some of the member's own colleagues are laughing behind his back over there.

Mr. Speaker, "what does he know that he's not telling us?" Was that the thing?

Part of the job of the opposition is to try - I recognize this; I'm not saying I agree with it. They see as part of their duty to try to raise undue suspicions, to try to point to ghosts which don't exist, and I accept that as a part of political repartee that happens. But I'll tell you what, Mr. Speaker. When you're dealing with the hundreds of thousands of depositors that quite faithfully deal with this institution - senior citizens, young entrepreneurs, women just starting out in business - and a person for political purposes tries to raise suspicion which undermines the faith of those depositors, I think they need to question their motive. I would ask the member if he wants to rephrase the question again so that his own members don't laugh at it, and maybe ask the CEO.

I'll tell you something else, Mr. Speaker. To put the sincerity of this member in light, I met with this member at my request after repeated requests and invitations on my behalf to sit down with him to discuss any issues related to financial issues or the ATB. He's a very busy person. He's far busier than I am, because it was a long time before he graced me with an opportunity to meet with him. At that meeting I said to him: I would like you to avail yourself of the opportunity to sit down with the CEO and ask him any questions you like at any time. He hasn't done that. Instead, he tosses out a mischievous little question like this at which his own colleagues laughed, as did mine, and he expects us to see him as sincere. Why don't you ask that question of the CEO, as I've invited you to sit down and meet with him?

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, it was a trick question. He doesn't know a thing, obviously.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to help remind him of a couple of things. I'll table quotes from the president of the ATB talking of privatization, and I'll table the Premier talking about entertaining offers for the sale of the ATB so the Treasurer can become a little more familiar with his own portfolio.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, why does this Provincial Treasurer continue to hide

behind all the rhetoric? I guess, the other part of the discussion that you don't want to tell the House about – right? – that you weren't going to make it personal? You were going to stick with the facts. Stick with the facts now.

Speaker's Ruling Preambles

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, please. Remember that your signature is on a document that says that we should have a question and no preamble. Now, I'm going to let you proceed with the question. I would ask you, though, to do some homework. You send me a note by tomorrow when you've reviewed today's Blues explaining how what you've said to this point in time doesn't violate the document that you put your signature to. Okay? Just so I can really understand this.

Now please proceed with a brief question, and don't ask the Treasurer to tell us everything he knows about everything, because I know the elocution skills of the hon. gentleman and I'll never be able to get him to sit down. So please.

Treasury Branches (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, you're absolutely right.

Why does the Treasurer continue to hide Project Chinook from the stockholders in the Alberta Treasury Branch, from the Alberta public? Why don't you tell us about Project Chinook, and what it is that you're going to do with the results?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I have no project called Project Chinook. You know, I don't know what the reason of the member opposite is for trying to raise something of a suspicious nature. If this is some project which the CEO or the chair of the Treasury Branches has undertaken, then good for them. I continue to extend the invitation to the member, of which he has not availed himself, to sit down with the CEO and have a full discussion, even in fact, as I've extended the invitation, a confidential discussion on any matters which he would like to address related to the Treasury Branches. I think it is somewhat rare for a government minister to invite his critic to come and sit and discuss any of these issues. He refuses to do that. Instead, he chooses this tack. I question it.

Private Health Services (continued)

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, if the Workers' Compensation Board diverted all of its injured workers in Calgary and southern Alberta to the wanna-be HRG private, for-profit hospital, you know, that facility could fill up its 37 beds 365 days a year. Now, based upon the Workers' Compensation Board track record of privatization and given Bill 37, it seems a dead certainty to me that that is what's going to happen if Bill 37 passes. My question to the Minister of Health is this. Why is he pushing forward with this legislation that will allow the Workers' Compensation Board to put its clients into a private, for-profit hospital to have their major surgeries done while children, seniors, small business owners, average Albertans, people who need lifesaving surgery are waiting in line in the underfunded public system?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all I think the preamble to the leader of the third party's question has to be responded to. The public health care system of this province stands ready to serve, to treat, to heal the families, the WCB workers now and will in the future. So that public health care system is there for them.

However, as I have indicated a number of times – and I think the leader of the third party is well aware of this – there is an exemption. There is a clause in the Canada Health Act which, with the wisdom of that time in history in the Parliament of Canada, was put in to provide what is in effect an exemption from the usual controls over a public health care system for people covered by workers' compensation. As I recall, what I remember of the history of that particular time, there were two reasons for that particular exemption. One was that calculations had been done, and they felt that it was beneficial to society to get workers' back into the workforce as quickly as possible. The other one was that the employers were in effect paying twice for health care, one way through their premiums and the other through taxation. So there should be some recognition there. But that was a debate, as I remember it, that took place at the national level. It was a decision of the federal government at the time, and we are abiding by that decision.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, knowing that HRG has targeted victims much wider than the Workers' Compensation Board, my next question to the minister is this. Instead of pushing private, for-profit hospitals, why doesn't he fix the public health system so that both workers' comp patients as well as other Albertans receive prompt and high-quality surgery in properly funded public health facilities?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we have in the last approximately two and a half years injected a great deal of what we refer to as our reinvestment dollars in this province into the health care system. I think it would be fair to say that we have a range of surgical services, as one example, and other types of treatments in this province that compare with any other province in this country in terms of scope and availability.

Yes, I acknowledge that we do have waiting lists for certain procedures which are beyond what we would certainly like to see, but we are transforming those dollars into additional services, most recently in the city in which the hon. member lives. There is a new state-of-the-art catheterization lab planned, which will very, very significantly reduce the waits for that particular type of treatment. I could go on with other examples, Mr. Speaker.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, if the minister is so convinced that he and his government would like to live by not only the letter but the spirit of the Canada Health Act, why is it that he and his government, according to what I was told earlier today by the minister in the hallway, will not be supporting the subamendment that I introduced last night, which would rule out surgeries in private facilities that would require overnight stays? Why won't he agree with that subamendment?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, that particular subamendment, depending on the skills of the House leader of course, will be before the Assembly later today. At that time government will respond to the subamendment in the course of debate, which I think is the appropriate place.

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

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a result of the Kyoto protocol on climate change and its potential impact on Alberta's economy, Albertans have been following this important

issue very closely, as have all Canadians. The minister of environment has just returned from a follow-up meeting in Buenos Aires this past week. Would the minister tell the Legislature of any new initiatives that have taken place at the Buenos Aires meeting as well as any decisions and commitments that were made at COP4?

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Conference of the Parties 4 was quite different than the COP3 meeting. In fact in COP4 there were really no firm decisions made. Actually what happened is that it ended up being that there was a whole host of issues on the table in many fields, and sort of a menu was put together. Any country could put any issue on that they felt was important to them. A time line was set that in COP6, which is two years away, there would be some decisions made.

Now, going into COP4, Canada went in with an agreement from provinces on a whole number of issues. We noticed in our joint energy and environment ministers' meeting some month ago that there was a change in attitude of the federal government. We believe that they suddenly recognized that what the provincial ministers said in Regina last fall was very important and that they needed to get back to it. So in COP4 on the menu are all of the issues that we think are extremely important to Alberta. The flexible mechanisms are on it. That is critical to us. Sinks are on. I have a lot of concern particularly for the way the forestry sink is termed, because they talk about land use change as opposed to just afforestation and reforestation.

There is another little kink in it that concerns us because they talk about a debit like a forest fire. Well, then I ask: if you have a volcano, is there a debit for that in whatever country it happens to occur? So there's a lot of discussion to go on among those issues.

2:10

The other area is with compensation. That causes a great deal of concern for us. And one that snuck back on to the agenda that we thought we had off the table was the whole issue of agenda and priorities. What we are afraid is going to happen with that particular one is that the European Common Market will start telling Canada what kind of policies and procedures they have to have in place, and that's totally unacceptable.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much. My supplemental to the same minister, Mr. Speaker, would be: what are the impacts of these decisions on Albertans in terms of the process currently under way within Canada to develop a national consensus on this important topic?

MR. LUND: Well, as I indicated, we are really concerned about the time line. With no final decisions on how the flexible mechanisms are going to work, that means two years that companies that have now started to do things – they don't know how they're going to get credit or if they will get credit. I talked at great length with the federal minister about getting a mechanism in place so that, in fact, companies can be assured that if they invest money and they do certain things now, they will get credits. Not only for companies but the Alberta government: we have reduced our emissions by 10 percent; we want to have credit for that when the clock starts ticking in 2008. So that is one big concern of ours.

We also believe that we have to be very active in the discussion as it goes forward, because this menu has all kinds of issues completely on opposite sides. So Canada is going to have to be very strong and the provinces behind them as they are negotiating their way through the next two years.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question

to the minister would be: what would he see as the next steps in dealing with his provincial and federal counterparts to ensure Alberta's interests are respected during this process?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, the federal government has acknowledged that the policy that the Alberta government has developed is a good one, that we will continue to do best effort, that the voluntary challenge and registry is working. I guess to demonstrate that, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development hired an international firm to scour the world for companies that they could hold up in Buenos Aires as examples of companies that have taken on the challenge, and we were very proud that TransAlta Utilities of Alberta was one of the four companies identified as a company working under the voluntary process and, in fact, is recognized throughout the world for having done it.

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

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Lethbridge public school plebiscite would have had that community pay for basic textbooks and computers. Instead, the failed vote became a clear message to the government that the underfunding of schools will not be made up on the backs of taxpayers. My questions are to the Minister of Education. How will these Lethbridge students now get the texts needed for the new mathematics and English courses?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to answer this question. I think it's an important one. The first thing that I'd like to respond to is that there is only one taxpayer. Regardless of whether it's done through local assessment at the property tax level or whether it's done by the general revenue fund, both sources of revenues ultimately come from taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that we give school boards the authority to deal with issues at the local level with respect to how they employ their resources, including dollars for teaching resources. There is appropriate funding for each and every school board in this province on a per capita basis that is fair and equitable. [interjection]

Well, Mr. Speaker, I hear the hon. member talking about fund-raising, but . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, let's keep our comments through the chair. And hon. members sitting beside the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was given the floor today to raise a question. The Minister of Education was responding to his question. Let the dialogue continue through the Speaker. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, just put your hand on the shoulders of both your two colleagues and settle them down. Okay?

Hon. Minister of Education, have you concluded with your answer?

Education Funding (continued)

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to conclude on this particular issue, schools are appropriately funded throughout the

province of Alberta. We are always looking at where pressure points are, and we're prepared to respond. One of the hon. members today tabled a tabling asking for our increases in education to equal at least the rate of inflation. I think that was the pith and substance of her tabling. From 1997 through the year 2000 we'll be increasing and reinvesting money in education, a 13 percent increase. That is far greater than both the rate of inflation and the rate of growth anticipated over the next three years. So in response to her tabling, we've already done that. [interjection]

Well, I'm happy to answer the question. Schools are appropriately funded, and with respect to the school board's decision in Lethbridge we leave it up to the autonomy of local school boards with respect to the decisions on allocation of resources at the local level.

DR. MASSEY: Mr. Speaker, I beg your relief. You ask the impossible.

Back to Lethbridge. Is the minister's response and solution reasonable given that parent council chair, Maureen Calder,* says: I have tried to uncover dollars in our school and district budgets, but they aren't there?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of school trustees. That is why school trustees run for office. Again, that decision and that responsibility rests with school boards. Our responsibility – and I'm not shirking the responsibility that is provincial – is to ensure that there is an equitable and fair funding of students whether they're in Lethbridge or Fort McMurray or Pincher Creek or anywhere else in the province, and it is the local school board's job to make sure that they can do the job and answer to their constituency of voters as to how they spend their money.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister recognize that underfunding of education is a serious concern to Albertans and expand the mandate of the Jacques committee to review the adequacy of current funding levels for publicly funded schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I must reject the premise of the question that there is underfunding, because we have looked at issues that have created pressure points within the province of Alberta in specific areas. We have targeted particular areas. We've reinvested in a number of different areas. Again in response, as I indicated at the outset in the main question, we are reinvesting money in education: 13 percent from the years 1997 through 2000. Nobody would suggest that those hundreds of millions of dollars are an insignificant reinvestment in education.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Riverview.

Pine Shake Roofing

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of residents in St. Albert have rotting, untreated pine shakes on their homes. In particular, a number of those residences are seniors' condominium complexes. The number of homes affected in my constituency is considerable. Since pine shakes are in the building code, my question is to the Minister of Labour. Why was the government not demanding more research on the performance and durability of untreated pine shakes, and in particular, what degree of research is currently being done on the performance and durability of treated pine shakes?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question's a good

one, and I know that the member has been working hard and diligently with concerned constituents with respect to the issue of pine shakes. The initial 1988 listing of pine shakes and the subsequent updates through '92-93 indicated that the pine shake was accepted as one of 20 building roofing alternatives. Basically, the standata, the product listing sheet, says: may be used as a roof covering. This was subject to a great deal of research by the normal rigorous process that occurs through the National Building Code, which would include formerly the Canada Mortgage and Housing controls, late the Canadian Construction Materials Centre. This product, like any other product, would go through the same rigorous testing. Other research has been carried out on the product, and that has been done by the Alberta Research Council. I know that the minister responsible may want to add to that. It continues to be examined.

2:20

With respect to the member's second question in her first question, Mr. Speaker, when she said: what is being done on treated pine shakes? They are examining treated pine shakes. As we speak, they are going through environmental testing as to the effectiveness of the product that's being used in the treatment process.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, a brief supplementary.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, very brief, Mr. Speaker, just to provide you some background on where the Alberta Research Council was with this. In 1993 the head of the forest products division was retained by ED and T to serve as a member of the CSA standards technical committee. He was one of 22 on that committee. He was also one of 13 members on the northern pine shakes committee. ARC performed an evaluation on existing shake roofs for the subcommittee for recommendation for CSA standards.

I would make two points in regard to the ARC findings: one, ARC provided no warranty as to their durability, and in submitting the results ARC pointed out very clearly that in the installations they examined, almost all of the installations exceeded the 7 percent off-grade allowance of the CSA standard. I can explain that, but I can see you nodding to me.

I also have a letter dated November 16, '93, to the pine shakes manufacturers association which concludes on behalf of ARC, Mr. Speaker, that their work is as a testing organization only and ARC does not have the ability to issue tags or to act as a certification organization. To conclude, Mr. Speaker, ARC did not endorse the use of pine shakes and did not back any manufacturer's warranty.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we've had two ministers talk for nearly five minutes now in response to your two questions. So, perhaps, one to wrap it up.

MRS. O'NEILL: Well, Mr. Speaker, being a very important matter in my constituency, I would like to ask the Minister of Labour if he could tell me what measures he is taking to ensure that the applied spray treatment is environmentally safe and an effective preservative on the existing pine shakes?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, we are reacting, again, to the good concerns raised by a diligent and effective representative as well as the concerns that have been raised by other good members, the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and of course the Minister of Municipal Affairs. The work that's being done with

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

treated pine shakes is work in progress. It is in compliance now with the Building Code with respect to health and safety. As we've done with the entire pine shakes file, as any information becomes available, it's immediately brought out and is available for discussion.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, I would advise not only the members' constituents but other members' constituents that their first place to check is with the builder, with the warranties that are offered through the manufacturer, and indeed with the roofer. Any warranties, either implied or specific, are the responsibility of manufacturer, roofer, builder. I know that we're also working hard with consumer and corporate affairs to be able to ensure that accurate information is out there both on untreated and treated pine shakes. I would also refer members and concerned constituents, Mr. Speaker, to the Alberta government Labour web site.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. member, you're not responsible for the comprehensiveness of the responses to your questions, so proceed with your final supplemental.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, because I did have an important second supplemental question. That is to the Provincial Treasurer. What are you planning to do to address the concerns of the large number of Albertans who have problems with untreated pine shakes?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite appropriately raising concerns brought to her by constituents, and I would say that the Minister of Labour has done a very effective job in terms of reaching out to these folks and seeing what might be done. Obviously it's not a question of liability, and that's been made very clear. But I think that when you consider that the minister has co-ordinated the pine shakes stakeholder working groups, written correspondence has gone to the Insurance Bureau of Canada to make sure they are fully aware of the situation, making available the fact sheets – three, I believe, related to this particular issue – and arranging meetings with manufacturers and roofers, I think that's a constructive way to address the problem and see if there's some consensus on how it can be addressed, staying short of a liability question on the part of government. Of course, that's been quite clear.

I want to commend the member for raising these issues and the Minister of Labour and others for sitting down with the groups involved and seeing if there are some things that can be done to help with the problem.

THE SPEAKER: Just so that not too many members get too exercised, that time frame for those series of questions and answers equaled the amount of time that was spent on the third Official Opposition main questions and answers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Social Care Facilities Review Committee

MRS. SLOAN: Current law currently requires that social care facilities be investigated for the care, treatment, and standards of accommodation in these facilities. However, the chair of the committee has recently deflected a request for an investigation into the death of a man at a single men's hostel, indicating that the committee may only conduct quality of service reviews. My questions are for the Minister of Family and Social Services. Can the minister explain to me the difference between investigating as required by the law and quality of service reviews?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be more than happy to respond to that. Approximately a year ago I asked the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall to conduct an investigation into the Social Care Facilities Review Committee and find out what was the best way that committee could function given that we had such things as PDD boards, that we had such things as children and family services authorities. He subsequently conducted a full review and felt that the best way that committee could function is by looking at the quality of service, looking at the quality of care that individuals in the social care facilities were receiving. Subsequently that mandate has been implemented and will be changed, hopefully in the upcoming session.

Mr. Speaker, the case in point that the hon. member tabled was an issue of a death in a single men's hostel, as she has alluded to. That, as in the letter I sent back to her, is being fully investigated under the Protection for Persons in Care Act.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain why child welfare has been placing 16- and 17-year-old children in a single men's hostel and hotel rooms when the process for investigating critical incidences has not been clear?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member well knows, 16- and 17-year-old children that are living independently are treated as adults.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll restate my question. My question was: why is child welfare placing wards of the government in single men's hostels while they are under the care of this government?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, as I stated in the second answer to this question, 16 and 17 year olds that are living independently are treated as adults. People that are wards of the government that are being placed in there are being placed there under critical circumstances. I would be more than happy to look into any allegations that the hon. member has, any allegations of any wrongdoing in my department. I would be more than happy to take a look at them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed maybe by the hon. Member of Edmonton-Norwood.

2:30

Pork Industry

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All of my questions are for the minister of Agriculture. Lacombe county has the highest per capita density of hogs raised in this province. Many of the producers have been calling me recently and are extremely worried. On average it costs \$120 to raise one pig or \$1.35 a kilogram or 28 cents a pound. This equates to an approximate \$60 loss per each animal sold. On behalf of my constituents, can you please explain: why did this government continually encourage increased hog production?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler is referring to a situation that is totally unprecedented and not predicted by any agriculture economist. Recently we've seen hog prices drop from a low of about \$1.05 and free-fall to about 57 cents a kilogram. It came as a result of various situations around the world: Russia has dropped right out of the market – they don't have any money to buy meat per se – continuing problems in Japan, and also some of the trade dispute problems we're having with the Americans.

With respect to the question posed as to why the Alberta

government or this particular department was looking towards adding more livestock production to the province, we saw a significant change in government policy in this country a few years ago, and that was the elimination of the Crow rate, which paid for part of the cost of shipping raw commodity grain from the producer to port. Well, that was totally eliminated, and as result the producer then had to look to find ways of adding value to that grain rather than exporting it. Also, looking at the statistics from 1990, raw commodity exports to other countries have dropped off by 8 percent. Value added increased in that same period by 137 percent, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. GORDON: What can hog producers do to alleviate some of their current income difficulties?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we do have the only farm income disaster program in Canada, other than the one we're administering in the province of B.C. for that province. What we did last week was put out a news release identifying a six-point program as to what farmers can do in terms of bridging the period of really drastically reduced hog prices to the end of this year and how they can bridge that to an FIDP, farm income disaster program, application in January, and we're offering farm disaster loans at deferred interest and payment to bridge that gap so they can apply for the disaster program.

The problem here is that by legislation farmers have to wait until the end of the tax year before they can make the application. Secondly, we're also looking at what dollars are available in NISA. There's about \$502 million available in the NISA fund in the province of Alberta. Any producers that have been in the business long enough and have had the chance to put money into that program will be able to trigger that out. Unfortunately, only about 8 percent of all of the producers have about \$250,000 to \$500,000 in that program. A majority of producers have less than \$25,000.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Minister, have you engaged in discussion with or had communication from your federal counterpart, Lyle Vanclief, regarding recent statements made during a meeting with central Alberta farmers struggling with commodity prices, where he stated he wouldn't rule out a federal aid package; however he wants to find a long-term solution, not just an ad hoc remedy?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, on Thursday last week we met with the federal Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Lyle Vanclief. He arrived at Red Deer late Wednesday and went directly to his hotel room because he was a bit ill. Upon his exit from the province I think he left me with some of his flu. That's about the only thing we got out of the meeting.

One part of our discussion centred on how we can work together as a provincial government and federal government in reviewing what is available for farm income disaster programs or some sort of farm aid support. The feds have \$600 million in the fund, and that is the only thing they have available for farm income support. Most of those dollars are tied up in NISA dollars and crop insurance. We put the proposal forward that we think the feds should work with the provinces towards a national farm income disaster program built around the Alberta criteria and, secondly, that they should seriously have a look at the NISA program to ensure that program looks after the needs of all farmers, not just those that have been in the business for a number of years, and put substantial dollars into the program.

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

Supreme Court Decision on Probate Fees

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 22 the Supreme Court of Canada stood up for beleaguered taxpayers. The court ruled against probate fees that do not reflect the cost of the service and are, in fact, a direct tax. To the Minister of Justice: given that Alberta intervened in the Ontario case in the Supreme Court, are Alberta probate fees now an illegal direct tax?

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you for the question. The Justice department has reviewed the decision, a decision which I might add has significant implications for not only this Legislature but Legislatures across the country. In conjunction with the Treasurer we have solicited information from all departments regarding fees which may be impacted by the decision. A broader review of the potential governmentwide impact is continuing to be co-ordinated with Treasury. In fact, we are providing legal advice to Treasury in that area. We are doing that as expeditiously as possible, Mr. Speaker, because the decision has certainly created a great deal of uncertainty in the community with respect to a number of government fees.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without an accountability framework how do Albertans know that delegated administrative organizations are collecting fees equal to the cost of providing the services?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, what we're in the process of doing and part of the review is to determine what fees are being charged and what service is being provided, and we're trying to answer questions of that nature through this review.

MS OLSEN: Finally, again for the Minister of Justice: it would now seem timely to convene the Committee on Law and Regulations. Will you commit to do this to review those premiums?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, some members of the House know that I chaired that very important committee for a number of years, which never did meet. [interjection] Best Chairman ever. Thank you, member.

I will point out to the House that what is required in order for that committee to meet is a directive from the Legislature. If the hon. member wishes to have the committee convene, I believe it would be in order for the opposition to bring forward a motion of that nature if they so wished. At this stage we don't see a need. We're conducting a very thorough review in conjunction with the Treasurer regarding the decision. We hope to have an answer in the very near future because we understand and appreciate what a significant impact this has had regarding fees.

head:

Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Three hon. members have indicated their intent to provide a member's statement today. We'll proceed in the following order. First of all the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

2:40

Des Cooper

MRS. GORDON: Saturday night Lacombe residents paid tribute to an outstanding gentleman. Lacombe has been the fortunate recipient of his long-standing service. With the population well

exceeding 8,700, we have continued to utilize the services of a very capable volunteer fire chief, Des Cooper. Des's ongoing commitment to the Lacombe fire department is exceptional. He has served a total of 29 years, 15 as a firefighter, 14 in his position as chief. His recent retirement will leave a gap, a big hole for the department to fill.

Volunteering in this capacity is not an easy task, and to do so for 14 consecutive years says a great deal about the man: his passion, his willingness to give of many, many hours away from his home and family, his quest for new technologies, his knowledge regarding the transportation of dangerous goods, his desire for ongoing training, his leadership skills, his ability to instill confidence and trust in fellow members, and last but not least, his ongoing commitment to people and place, to the many, many residents of Lacombe and area he so faithfully served.

Thank you, Des. I wish you well in all new endeavours.

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

Métis Week

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize the Métis people of Alberta and thank all those in the Métis Nation of Alberta who have organized this week as Métis Week 1998. The Métis people have had an important role in the history of this province, and there are nearly 60,000 Métis people in this province today, four that I know in this Legislature.

The association works to end discrimination, to promote the interests of Métis people, and to celebrate Métis distinctiveness. Many people don't realize that the Métis traditions are quite different from those of the First Nations peoples. For example, they don't participate in sweat lodges. They have arts and cultural differences, and we can see that from the excellent program that the Métis Nation has arranged this week, which includes traditional Métis Red River dancing and music.

There are eight settlements, that the government created in 1990, and they are home to nearly 6,000 Métis people. However, there are many more than those living on the settlements. The Métis Nation of Alberta promotes the interests of all Métis people across this province. It is finding ways to increase self-governance and is putting forward new initiatives at both the provincial and federal levels.

As a member of the Métis Nation I am very proud of the work that's being done in the community, and the Alberta Liberal caucus will continue to support the endeavours and wish the Métis people of Alberta a very special celebration this week.

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

Bert and Alice Brown

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to congratulate two of my constituents. They're typical of the residents of the Airdrie-Rocky View constituency; that is to say, they are regular people who do extraordinary things. While they are in fact a married couple and supportive of one another's goals and aspirations, they have both succeeded in their own ways.

Bert Brown, better known as Mr. Triple E, has just been elected as a Senator-in-waiting for the province of Alberta. This was not an overnight success for Bert. I've known him for 15 years, and he was determined then that no province in Canada should run the risk of having their economy devastated by the federal government, as Alberta's had been with the passage of the national energy program. What made it even worse for Bert at that time was that the national

energy program was also passed by the Senate, which was supposed to represent sober second thought for the regions of Canada. He embarked on his quest, and on October 19, 1998, he took another step in his goal of having a triple E Senate for Canada. I know Bert well enough to say that he won't stop until all Canadians have the right to elect an equal and effective Senate which would truly represent all parts of this country.

I mentioned that both Bert and Alice deserve recognition. Alice has been a longtime advocate for recognition of farm women as full working partners in their family farms. She founded the first Alberta women's conference committee bringing Alberta farm women's organizations together under the Alberta Farm Women's Network. She helped change federal legislation, which allowed farm women equal access to grain advance payments, and she was also involved in changing Stats Canada census forms to include women's labour on farms as an economic measure of input costs.

For these and many more reasons Alice was awarded the 1998 Governor General's award in commemoration of the Persons case, which of course is recognition of the Famous Five women, who on October 18, 1929, won a decision that gave recognition to women as persons in Canada.

I'd like to offer congratulations and best wishes to both Bert and Alice Brown.

Head: Privilege Allegations against a Member

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before proceeding to Orders of the Day, I indicated yesterday, after hearing the discourse and the petitions made by several members with respect to a purported question of privilege, that I in fact would be hopefully prepared to rule on this question today, and I am prepared.

The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities is here; the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert is here. The hon. Government House Leader, I gather, will be represented by the two Deputy Government House Leaders. I am prepared to rule on the purported questions of privilege debated yesterday, November 16, 1998.

The events giving rise to the question of privilege arose during question period on April 29, 1998, the last day of the spring sitting, in relation to certain questions posed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Yesterday the chair invited the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities to state his question of privilege. The hon. Government House Leader also raised a question of privilege in connection with the same statements raised by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. The chair then deferred ruling on the matter until this afternoon. Given the fact that both purported questions of privilege stem from the same statements made by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, the chair will deal with both questions in a single ruling.

As a preliminary matter, the chair finds that the questions of privilege raised by the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities and by the hon. Government House Leader were raised at the earliest opportunity and that sufficient notice was provided in accordance with Standing Order 15(2).

The chair would also like to highlight the statements that have given rise to these purported questions of privilege. On April 29, 1998, during question period the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert posed certain questions to the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities. She stated her supplemental questions as follows, on page 1810 of *Hansard* for that day. First supplemental:

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?

Second supplemental:

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 hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities asserted that his privileges as an hon. member of this Assembly were breached because the statements in the first supplementary question implied that he as an hon. member of the Assembly and a minister of the Crown does not care about the lives of Albertans. The minister also argued that the final supplementary question included a clear and explicit accusation and that this amounted to a libelous statement and an insult against his reputation and integrity as an hon. member and as a minister, which is a breach of privilege or contempt pursuant to section 10 of the Legislative Assembly Act.

The thrust of the hon. Government House Leader's argument is on the breach of the corporate privileges of the Assembly; namely, that the statements in question constitute a contempt of the Assembly because of their impact on the members' and the Assembly's status in the eyes of the public. He also argued that these statements insult the work of members and diminish the respect due to the Assembly.

In opposition to the questions of privilege raised, the Official Opposition House Leader stated that the arguments raised do not establish that the minister's rights have been breached in that he had not been prevented from doing his job. The Official Opposition House Leader also stated that although the statements in question were very direct, aggressive questions, the questions did not include any accusation.

Finally, the Official Opposition House Leader stated *Beauchesne* paragraph 31 to the principle that this matter amounts to a dispute as to allegation of facts and therefore does not fulfill the conditions of privilege.

The chair's role is to determine whether a prima facie question of privilege exists.

Before reviewing the May 11, 1994, ruling, which has been cited by both the Minister of Transportation and Utilities and the hon. Government House Leader, the chair would like to summarize the key characteristics of parliamentary privilege as stated by Maingot in *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, at page 14:

To constitute "privilege" generally there must be some improper obstruction to the Member in performing his parliamentary work in either a direct or constructive way, as opposed to mere expression of public opinion or of criticisms of the activities of the Members (for example, threatening a Member for what he said in debate, contemptuous reflections on Members, allegations of improper conduct during a proceeding in Parliament, or allegations that a chairman was biased).

The chair would also like to point out that a breach of privilege is associated with the special rights of a member, as Maingot states at page 224:

Parliamentary privilege is concerned with the special rights of Members, not in their capacity as Ministers or as party leaders, whips or parliamentary secretaries, but strictly in their capacity as Members in their parliamentary work.

Certainly in reviewing the statements made on April 29, 1998, by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, it is clear that these statements include allegations, impute motives, and include inflammatory language and are therefore definite grounds for a point of order pursuant to Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). The question is whether these statements go further than the usual cut and thrust of debate. In considering this question, the chair

notes that it is not the truth of the statements that is the issue. The question is whether the member's statements have obstructed the ability of the House to perform its functions by diminishing the respect owed to both the Assembly and the work of the members.

2:50

In making his arguments yesterday, the minister quoted from *Bourinot's*, fourth edition, about libelous reflections on members. It is always very, very interesting to review these authorities such as *Bourinot*, which members may know was last revised in 1916. In the chair's reading of the relevant portion, it appears that the examples refer to cases involving statements made by persons outside the House. The chair would also note that *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, paragraphs 64 to 70 refer to reflections on members, but like *Bourinot* it seems to refer to statements made outside the House.

It is the responsibility of the House and the chair to ensure that language used in the House complies with our rules of parliamentary language. *Maingot* states on this point, pages 254-5:

Language spoken during a parliamentary proceeding that impugns the integrity of members would be unparliamentary and a breach of order contrary to the Standing Orders, but not a breach of privilege.

In comparing the statements of the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to the statements which gave rise to Speaker Schumacher's 1994 ruling, the chair would note that in that instance there were substantive charges raised alleging interference in the awarding of contracts, which amount really to a charge against a member. As the chair has noted, the statements of the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert contain allegations and impute motives. The chair finds it difficult to place these in the same category as those made in 1994.

It is most regrettable that the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert made these rhetorical flourishes. A question of privilege is, as the members noted yesterday in their arguments, a very serious matter. In order for a prima facie case to be established, it must be shown that there has been an interference or obstruction in either a member's ability to perform his or her functions or the ability of the House to carry out its functions. This type of obstruction does not appear to have occurred. Rather, these statements, although clearly unparliamentary and inappropriate, appear to be of the nature that can arise during the heat of debate in question period.

Accordingly, the chair does not find that there has been a prima facie case for a breach of privilege. However, the chair is rather disheartened by the unparliamentary language used in these statements and is very disappointed that the hon. member did not use the opportunity provided her yesterday afternoon to comment on the matter. The chair would like to make it clear to all members that comments of this nature are inappropriate and will not be allowed. These types of statements clearly diminish the respect and dignity owed to this Assembly and should not and will not be permitted.

Under the circumstances, would the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert now wish to do the honourable thing and clarify her remarks?

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Highway 794 is a very emotional topic in my community, and I was attempting on behalf of my constituents to get some answers. I certainly retract any statements that can be construed as a personal attack on the minister.

head: **Orders of the Day**
 head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than**
 head: **Government Bills and Orders**
 head: **Second Reading**
Bill 216
Citizens' Initiative Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to move second reading of Bill 216, the Citizens' Initiative Act.

The Citizens' Initiative Act is a bill that will enhance our present system of democracy by allowing citizens a different level of participation and a more direct role in our democratic system. It is a measure which allows citizens to bring forward and vote on a legislative proposal in a very grassroots, bottom-to-top way. These are the key elements of Bill 216's focus: it is grassroots and bottom to top. It gives Albertans a new avenue by which issues of great importance can be brought to this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, the Citizens' Initiative Act has come up for debate before in this House. In 1994 it was sponsored by the now Minister of Justice, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, and again in 1996 by the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the present minister responsible for science, research, and information technology. Despite support from members on both sides of the floor the bill was nearly defeated at second reading. It is my wish that the bill has finally reached its time.

Grassroots democracy has become even more important in the mind's eye of the public over the last few years, and there is growing support for referenda and plebiscites as positive contributions to our system of government. This bill is meant to enhance democracy in Alberta and complement the work we do as elected members of the provincial government. It will not threaten the powers of the Legislature or impinge upon the authority of the Lieutenant Governor. In no way does it seek to replace or interfere with the work done by the Legislative Assembly. Mr. Speaker, the spirit and intent of Bill 216 is consistent with this government's policy of consultation, openness, and accountability to Albertans.

I would like to take the next few minutes to outline for the members of this Assembly how the Citizens' Initiative Act would work. Mr. Speaker, the process outlined in the bill can be divided into three main steps for a citizen who wishes to bring forward an initiative. In drafting the bill, high but reasonable thresholds and fairly stringent requirements were used. This was done in order to make sure that initiatives will not be brought forward without a great deal of thought and that they have the support of a great number of Albertans.

The first step for a citizen would be to apply to the Chief Electoral Officer with a proposal for an initiative petition. The Chief Electoral Officer then ensures that the subject meets certain conditions as stated in the bill; that is, it cannot require the expenditure of public funds, impose a tax or impost, exceed provincial jurisdiction, or violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. For example, the proposal could not concern the establishment of a sales tax or an issue that falls within federal jurisdiction, such as the armed forces or capital punishment, and because it must comply with the Charter, the rights of minorities could not be threatened.

When submitting his or her application, the applicant must also include a draft bill suitable for introduction in the House and a draft question that could be used in an initiative vote. Putting together

a draft bill, as the members of this Assembly have learned through their own experience, is a very involved process which requires a great deal of thought and research as well as the assistance of a legal counsel. It certainly requires a high level of commitment from any private citizen who wishes to draft a bill for the purposes of an initiative.

Once the application and application fee are submitted, the Chief Electoral Officer decides whether the specified requirements have been met. If so, an initiative petition will be issued. At this point the sponsor has 180 days to collect signatures totaling 10 percent of all the ballots cast in the last provincial election, 10 percent of the ballots cast in the last provincial election in at least two-thirds of constituencies. This is of course no small feat. In the last provincial election 948,338 Albertans voted. This means that a minimum of 94,834 citizens would have to sign in support of this petition. Mr. Speaker, the double majority requirement ensures that a broad cross section of Albertans must support the initiative if it is to succeed at this stage. It cannot be an issue that is supported only by the urban or the rural constituencies. At this point, if the required number of signatures are acquired, the Chief Electoral Officer will report this result to the Lieutenant Governor in Council, who will within six months announce a date on which the initiative election will be held.

At this point the third stage of the citizens' initiative process begins. Now, although the date on which the initiative election is to be held must be announced within a short period of time, it need not be held for some time. The bill states that an initiative election can be held in conjunction with a provincial general election, local general elections, or on a separate date altogether.

Mr. Speaker, for a proposal to succeed in an initiative election, it must achieve a majority of 60 percent of the total votes cast in the province and a 60 percent majority in at least two-thirds of constituencies. Again, this double majority requirement means that there must be strong support for the proposal before it can move to the next step in the process. If the initiative election is successful, the government must then introduce the proposal in bill form at the next sitting of the Legislature. At this point it leaves the hands of the citizenry and is introduced in the House for debate by Members of the Legislative Assembly. The Assembly acts, so to speak, as a place of sober second thought regarding the initiative.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, if over 99,000 Albertans sign a petition on a proposal and 60 percent of voters subsequently support it, there certainly would be an expectation that the bill would be considered with some seriousness. As with any piece of government-initiated legislation the input of average Albertans has an influence. Public consultation has become a very important part of developing legislation in Alberta. It is rare to bring forward a bill that has not been through a consultation process with either the general public or stakeholder groups. This is due to this government's commitment to openness and accountability as well as a recognition of the valuable input that Albertans can provide on important issues.

Bill 216 carries the philosophy behind public consultation one step further. It is a bottom-to-top process, which gives Albertans the power to initiate legislation within the criteria laid out in the bill from the grassroots level. Once the bill reaches the Legislature, the Assembly is to treat the bill as it would any other piece of legislation that was introduced for debate in the House. In other words, there is no requirement that the Assembly must pass the bill, and there is no provision that would limit amendments to improve the bill.

Mr. Speaker, there are provisions in the Citizens' Initiative Act

which limit the number of initiative petitions which can occur at any one time and the frequency with which substantially similar issues may be raised. The bill states that an application for a petition is only acceptable if it is not "substantially the same as" another application made within the last 12 months or "the subject of an initiative election" that has occurred since the last general election. In this way the bill prevents the same issue from arising frequently and repeatedly.

Bill 216 also states that

the Chief Electoral Officer shall not issue an initiative petition if there are 5 [outstanding] initiative petitions on which initiative elections have not [yet] been held.

These two combined provisions of the bill will help to ensure that we would not be looking at the sort of situation we've heard about in some U.S. states, where there can be dozens, even hundreds of initiatives on the ballot at any one time. With the large number of signatures required for an initiative petition and the double majority requirements for an initiative election, it is doubtful that there would even be a potential for the frequency or quantity of citizens' initiatives that could occur for this to become an issue.

The bill's requirements also ensure that we will not be faced with the situation of frivolous or extremely radical proposals arising. A proposal must have a very substantial degree of support among the electorate to be successful. There is a limited time frame of 180 days to collect the required number of signatures and a large number of signatures to be collected. The individuals involved in the process must be well organized.

Mr. Speaker, at present we have no legislation in place allowing citizens to propose legislation, but grassroots democracy has always played an important role in this province, and Alberta has had a lengthy and positive history with referenda over the years. Back in 1913, when Alberta was in its infancy, the government of the day, a Liberal government in fact, supported by the Conservative opposition enacted the Direct Legislation Act. This act allowed the government to submit legislative proposals directly to the electorate for their approval and also allowed citizens to initiate legislation from their end to be submitted to the government. Like Bill 216, this act didn't allow for citizens' initiatives legislation to expend public money or go beyond the province's jurisdiction. The Direct Legislation Act allowed for citizens' initiatives in a somewhat different manner than does Bill 216, Mr. Speaker. It required that a petition submitted to the Legislature have signatures equaling or exceeding 20 percent of electors. If the necessary number of Albertans supported a proposed law, it was to be enacted during the session of the Legislature during which the petition was presented. This act was never used by Albertans and in fact was repealed by Premier Manning in 1958.

Alberta still maintains some direct voting provisions in its statutes, among them the Constitutional Referendum Act and the plebiscite provisions of the Election Act. The Constitutional Referendum Act allows the government to hold plebiscites on constitutional matters while the plebiscite provisions under the Election Act grant the Lieutenant Governor in Council the ability to hold a general plebiscite in order to gauge the electorate's opinion about amending existing or introducing new legislation. These provisions, while they are very valuable in generating input from Albertans, still involve a top-to-bottom rather than a bottom-to-top process. This is what Bill 216 hopes to change by ensuring that the process is more properly a two-way process.

I mentioned that citizens' initiative has long been an important part of the American political process, Mr. Speaker, but this type of legislation also exists elsewhere in the world. Switzerland comes to mind as an example. In terms of other Canadian provinces,

British Columbia has had legislation in place allowing for citizens' initiatives since 1995.

The requirements of B.C.'s act with respect to the process for citizens' initiatives are similar to those of Bill 216. A petition granted under British Columbia's legislation must be returned within 90 days and must be signed by at least 10 percent of the total number of electors for each constituency in the province. This certainly is a bit higher than the threshold set by Bill 216, but both were designed to ensure that issues have broad support before they proceed further. In the case of an initiative vote, a 50 percent plus one majority is required in two-thirds of B.C.'s electoral divisions to succeed, at which point the draft bill will be introduced into the Legislature at the earliest practical opportunity.

B.C.'s experience with this sort of legislation indicates that citizens' initiative is likely to be used sparingly. Since the coming into force of B.C.'s Recall and Initiative Act in 1995, only four petitions have been granted by their Chief Electoral Officer. Of these, none have had the popular support needed to make it past this stage. It makes sense that it would only be those proposals that the electorate considers important and valid that would succeed. What is important in terms of this sort of legislation is that the opportunity for citizens to bring forward proposals is there.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I would like to say that citizens' initiative has strong support from grassroots Albertans and that Bill 216 can only help to enhance our current democratic system. There are enough checks within the legislation to prevent initiatives being brought forward that don't have a good chance of achieving the support of a large majority of Albertans, but a proposal that does not have the support of a large number of Albertans and is important enough to meet the requirements of the act is a proposal that is clearly worthy of consideration and debate in this Assembly. That is all that this bill promises, that a proposal that passes the requirements of an initiative petition and election will be introduced for debate and that, most importantly, Albertans will have yet another opportunity to participate in the direction of our province.

I urge each of the members of this Assembly to support second reading of Bill 216. Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great interest that I rise to speak to this bill. I have many concerns in relation to the notion that this is held out as direct democracy. Past debate on similar bills have made reference to direct democracy, and the member introducing the bill today again alluded to those bills. This bill in fact is not much different.

In my view, true direct democracy would allow for any type of bill to be put forward, including a bill that would require an expenditure of public funds and impose taxes. In fact, if you look at the initiatives that were accepted in the U.S. for the November elections, you'll see a great majority of them were what we would consider money bills. A successful initiative in a true direct democracy would become law. In this bill, it merely gets introduced into the Legislative Assembly without any guarantee of debate. This in fact sounds like empty symbolism. If this legislation is passed, it in fact only pays lip service to the citizens' initiative. It isn't likely that an initiative would become law.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

This bill also states that any initiative put forward must not violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Well, let's think about that for a moment. There are a significant number of

issues where a point has not yet been litigated in the courts. These points cannot be categorized as contrary to the Charter. However, it may seem inevitable that the courts would find that the points raised infringe on the Charter of Rights. For example, the narrow issue of the Vriend case is the Individual's Rights Protection Act and the Charter. Vriend does not settle any other issues like access to family law remedies for gay and lesbian couples. Neither of these cases, Vriend or the example I've given, touches on the income tax law or workers' compensation provisions and their definition of a spouse. The Supreme Court of Canada has also not yet ruled that caning contravenes the Charter under section 12, cruel and unusual punishment. A person or group of persons could bring forward an initiative that would add caning to the sentencing options for the provincial offences. I bring these examples forward to highlight the difficulty in determining what does and does not violate the Charter.

3:10

This bill provides for a citizens' initiative that could require the House to invoke the notwithstanding clause. If we look at the U.S. for the types of bills that are introduced, we've talked about money bills, but we also see issues like equality for gays and lesbians, abortion, the medical use of marijuana on the list, apparent special interest issues.

I must remind this Assembly of the words of former Justice Brian Dickson, echoed by Justice Iacobucci, when he was writing his decision on the Vriend case. He stated that the court must be guided by the values and principles essential to a free and democratic society which embody respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, commitment to social justice and equality, accommodation of a wide variety of beliefs, and respect for cultural and group identity. In my view, it's not only the courts that must be mindful of this quote but legislators as well. It would be a mark against democracy, in my view, to see human rights violations allowed through a citizens' initiative.

Research has also shown the growing involvement of U.S. legislators in pursuing citizens' initiatives. Legislators have also had special interest groups pursue initiatives they can support and would support through the citizens' initiative process but don't have the political spine to bring the issue before the Legislature as private members' bills. I would find this to be rather disturbing. Given that the proposed bill would allow the override principle to be used, it would in fact put the minority up against the tyranny of the majority, something we as legislators are here to prevent.

Even to consider this bill palatable, I would have to see the member accept amendments that would reflect prohibition on the use of the Charter override principle. I would also like to see the bill reject any initiative that is not only contrary to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act but the Canada Act of 1867 as well as the Charter, as has already been stated, that would require the Legislative Assembly not to invoke the notwithstanding clause and reject anything that proposes the separation of any province or territory from Canada.

Another section of the bill that concerns me is the necessity to have someone draft his or her own bill. We in this Assembly know the intricacies of having a bill drafted. We know the need for clear, concise, plain language. It would seem to me that the only people who could bring an initiative forward would be those interest groups with a large lobby or lots of money. If a group or person does not have a substantial amount of money to get this done, then a poorly drafted bill would not likely get any support from the public, much less the legislators.

Another issue is the timing of the initiative election. "When the

[CEO] reports that an initiative petition is successful, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall within 6 months of the date of the report order . . ." Why not narrow this window of opportunity to 30 days? This would show good faith in attempting to reach true direct democracy.

An additional concern is with the three options for the Lieutenant Governor to call the election. Since municipal elections are held at intervals of 1,095 days and provincial elections are held – and it's been the history in this province, I believe – on average at intervals of 1,332 days, this can make it a rather lengthy time before issues get voted on.

If direct democracy is the road that private members in this Assembly want to walk down, that's great. Can you explain to me how the public will become educated on all the issues? Five issues on one ballot, going to the polls, are a lot for the public to know. If you talk to most Americans, they'll tell you that they don't know very much about all the issues, maybe one or two of the issues.

MR. DOERKSEN: You know better.

MS OLSEN: Thank you.

Again, if we're to rely on the media, then the media must think about what news it delivers and how it delivers it. We have experienced in this province much of the print media being owned by one or two people and similar concerns with radio and television. At this point I'm not sure that some of the media outlets are up to the challenge to provide unbiased reporting, and in fact it may not be their role. Most citizens believe they elected us to represent them and as MLAs to take on that role.

In this debate I've highlighted some of the more substantive concerns about the bill. I think we as legislators have a much larger issue to deal with. Direct democracy, in my view, is populist window dressing. I would even go so far as to agree with Professor Alan Rosenthal of the Eagleton Institute, who stated: this type of lawmaking is sloppy. It may be time that we as legislators need to be more responsive to our own electorate. I often wonder if this movement towards direct democracy arises out of our own government not being able to establish priorities for the citizens who elected them.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will take my seat and listen to the debate. I will put forward some amendments that I believe will help achieve true democracy, if that's what the Assembly wants, instead of what appears to be pseudodirect democracy.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. minister of information and technology.

DR. TAYLOR: Science, research, and information technology, Mr. Speaker. It's quite a long title.

I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, to stand up and talk about Bill 210, the Citizens' Initiative Act.

MR. RENNER: Bill 216.

DR. TAYLOR: Bill 216; I'm sorry. I have a bit of confusion there, Mr. Speaker, because when I introduced the bill, it was Bill 210. So I may occasionally call it 210 in my speech here, but it is Bill 216. I'm pleased to be able to stand and support this bill, introduced by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. It was noted earlier by the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake that both the Minister of Justice and myself had previously introduced this bill, and both the Minister of Justice and myself continue to support this bill.

What Bill 216 is about, Mr. Speaker, is returning to our democratic roots in this province. This country and this province rest firmly on the principles of democracy, and this democracy has been put in place during the history and tradition of Alberta, since 1905. People have put this democracy in place because people wanted, in fact demanded a democratic government here. [interjection] Thank you for the note, hon. members.

The people of Canada and Alberta, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, want and deserve a democratic tradition, and it's in that tradition that Bill 216 comes forward. Bill 216 proposes a minor but important change in our current system of governance. It would allow any elector in the province to propose and vote on legislation. It creates, I must point out, no additional obligation on the part of elected representatives to accept any legislation. That has to be very clear. But it does give Alberta electors a special opportunity that they have not known for years. As was pointed out, we had an act similar to this, but it was repealed by Mr. Manning and the Social Credit government.

Mr. Speaker, this is the beauty of our democratic system: it can be flexible. What this bill does, Bill 216, is provide more flexibility in our democratic system. It is possible to create or repeal or alter any law within our jurisdiction. But who should that power belong to? That's what we're debating here, the fundamentals of democracy. Who has the right to do that: elected representatives or average Albertans or, as the Premier calls them, severely normal Albertans, of which, I must say, there are none on the opposite side? [interjections] So what I'm suggesting, in spite of the harassment from the opposition, is the fact that both elected representatives and the average electors need to have input into our system.

Now, I would say that elected representatives are necessary in our large province with our substantial population. If I might just comment for a minute, Mr. Speaker. As you know, several years ago we had a boundary review, and we changed the boundaries. I must say that I expressed some concern about that at the time and will tend to express that concern in the future. My constituency, the wonderful constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, includes about a third of Medicine Hat, the subdivisions of Ross Glen and South Ridge, and then about 20,000 square miles of rural Alberta. It's one of the largest constituencies in the province.

3:20

MRS. SOETAERT: Pearl's is bigger.

MS CALAHASEN: Right. Ninety-eight thousand square kilometres. I've got 522 buffalo.

DR. TAYLOR: I said: one of the largest. I didn't say that it was the largest. Certainly the Member for Lesser Slave Lake's constituency is bigger, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister, but we seem to have a lot of people who wish to speak on this, and we'll take note of them and put them on the list. To both sides of the House, we only have one person that is speaking at the moment lawfully, and that's the hon. minister for science, research, and information technology.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your bringing that correction to the House. As you know, I am very cautious and don't speak out of turn when other people are

speaking, so I would request to have the same respect from the members, on both sides of the House I might add.

Debate Continued

DR. TAYLOR: I was talking a little bit about my constituency and pointing out that the Member for Lesser Slave Lake's constituency is somewhat larger, but it's not much larger than that. She has people plus buffalo in her constituency, she informs me.

We have this large and diverse province. My constituency is a large and diverse constituency. In fact you may be interested, because you live close to Calgary, Mr. Speaker, by the fact that it takes longer to drive across my constituency, from one side of the constituency to the other, than it does to drive from Calgary to Medicine Hat.

MR. HERARD: Not the way you drive.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes, even the way I drive. If I drive the same speed in the constituency as I do on the highways, it takes longer to drive across my constituency than it does from Calgary to Medicine Hat.

So what we have is a very large and diverse province.

MR. DUNFORD: How long from Etzikom to Empress?

DR. TAYLOR: Etzikom to Empress would be approximately two hours and 20 minutes, minister of advanced education. I'm actually quite surprised he's heard of the communities of Etzikom and Empress, although Empress is just on the border of my constituency and is actually in the Minister of Community Development's constituency. That's about the borderline. It's actually at the Sandy Point bridge, and Etzikom is just past the Sandy Point bridge, minister of advanced education.

MR. MAR: Etzikom has a great museum.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I would point out that the Minister of Education has very clearly identified the Etzikom windmill museum. I would encourage all members of this House - I see members nodding on the other side that have already seen this museum. It's a tremendous museum, Mr. Speaker, that's part of my constituency.

MRS. SOETAERT: Relevance.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I can't do a travel commercial, I must point out. Thank you for raising that with me, hon. member.

Back to the point. So what we're saying is that we have a diverse province, a large province, and this bill provides an opportunity for Albertans to be involved very directly in the democratic process. As you know, we have elections in Alberta on average, if you look at the history of Alberta, which I have, every 3.78 years, which is roughly every four years. So what we can say, Mr. Speaker, is that that is the opportunity Albertans have, once approximately every four years, to be directly involved in direct voting, in the democratic process. But if we have a bill like this, Bill 216, Albertans will be able to have more direct involvement in the voting process than they have presently.

We know from what we have done as a government that Albertans appreciate the chance to be consulted, and we've had a number of consultations in this province, Mr. Speaker. We recently had the Growth Summit, which a number of very valuable

recommendations came out of. We had the lottery or gambling summit or whatever you want to call it in Medicine Hat; we had very valuable recommendations coming out of that. We will have a health summit, and we will get a nonpartisan group of individuals which will provide very valuable advice as well. So we know that Albertans like to be involved in the consultative process.

As an example of that consultative process, I might just hold this up so you can see it, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Oh, he's saying no to this.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: It's an exhibit.

AN HON. MEMBER: No props.

DR. TAYLOR: No props, they're telling me.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very valuable prop sitting here on my desk. It's a computer disk, and what this computer disk is is a result of consultation with Albertans. At the Alberta Science and Research Authority we were particularly interested in what Albertans involved in the information and communications technology industry thought about the ICT industry in Alberta. So I asked a man by the name of John Brick, who's the vice-president of NorTel, to establish a committee and consult – once again, this is what we do as a government – with Albertans on this issue.

Now, they came up with a number of points that you might find interesting, Mr. Speaker. The first thing that this committee came back and said is on this disk that is sitting on my desk, and I would encourage all members to get a copy of this disk and put it through their computers. I see some members have one, but if you haven't one already and would like one, by all means call my office and we'll get you one. It's really fantastic. [interjection] My office number is 427-1822. That was requested by another member, so there is the office number. Or if you want to walk up, the office room number is 423.

MR. SMITH: What's your E-mail address?

DR. TAYLOR: Just a minute. I don't have a business card, Minister of Labour. I could provide you with my E-mail address, because I do have one.

MRS. SOETAERT: Relevance.

DR. TAYLOR: We're talking about, Mr. Speaker, the consultation process and how it is important to consult Albertans on issues, and that's what this bill is about. So I'm providing a very good example of consultation with Albertans. It's relatively new, relatively recent, and very relevant to the future of Alberta, because if we want to grow as a province, we have to provide the right environment for the knowledge-based industries.

That's what this report is about. They pointed out in this report in consulting Albertans that, one, we should invest in education, in higher education. Today in Alberta there are approximately 2,000 jobs vacant in Alberta in the ICT industry because we do not have the necessary qualified people to fill those jobs. Two thousand jobs.

MR. SAPERS: What are you doing about it?

DR. TAYLOR: The suggestion has been made: what are we doing about it? I can tell you that the minister of advanced education and myself are going forward with a very ambitious program to deal with this issue.

The second thing that we consulted Albertans on . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. minister of science, research, and information technology, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

3:30

Municipal Funding

513. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mr. Gibbons:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to develop a system of stable and predictable funding arrangements with municipalities, clarify roles and responsibilities between provincial and local governments, develop an appropriate accountability framework, and determine the infrastructure priorities required to ensure sustained economic and human development within our local communities.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I am very pleased to move this motion. It's a very commonsense approach. It would even suggest that the government could use a plan, which I know seems to be a word they never use but one that would suggest a little bit of forethought. I know that many members were at the AUMA convention just last week, Friday, and I know that the concerns that they heard were exactly what were expressed in here: give us some stable funding; give us a three-year rolling grant; let us know what you're going to do, because then we can plan for our municipalities. You know, I heard a lot of responses from ministers that said: "Well, we'll take it back to the caucus. We'll consider it. We're listening." But never did I hear: we're acting on it. I think that's what municipalities certainly deserve. I think that over the past years the downloading and the off-loading to local governments and communities have created a tremendous, tremendous pressure on them, and it has hampered their ability to govern as well as they could.

In the last municipal elections it was interesting to see the different results, the changes in local government. Some didn't change at all, but in others there was quite a remarkable shift in the local elected people. Just one of those suppositions: maybe that was a reflection of municipalities having taken the burden of the deficit reduction on their shoulders. I think that local citizens blame them rather than considering from whence the real cuts came, which was this provincial government. So I think, in all fairness to local municipalities, that this motion should be accepted by this Assembly, and I'm sure that many people on both sides of the House will support this.

I want to speak for a moment about some of the things that the provincial government has done over the past five years, some bad things, I'm sorry to say, that have put pressure on municipal governments, that I think have been a bit unfair. We just heard one member from the other side talking about listening and consulting with the people of Alberta, but certainly they didn't listen at the Growth Summit, because one of the things that came out loud and clear was that the provincial transfer payments to municipalities have been cut too severely, in fact a decline of 55 percent. Just imagine trying to run your household on 55 percent less of your income. Many people would be forced to sell their homes, to move to a different location, and I think it would certainly affect the quality of life. That's quite a reduction, and I think that the municipalities have virtually carried the burden of that quite well, but I don't think they can take it anymore. I think that message has come across loud and clear from them. To support this motion

would be saying that this government and the people of this Assembly are listening to those local governments.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Some other things. The community recreation and culture grant is gone. The unconditional municipal grant has been reduced by 79 percent. Grants for regional planning commissions have been eliminated, and I have real concerns over that. That's not downloading; that's just letting it go totally. Now you have a hodgepodge of planning across the province, in fact in some places a hodgepodge of nonplanning across the province, and when you're talking about limited agricultural land, Special Places 2000, where you can have industry and not, I would think that the province would want regional planning. Instead of having an interim board or anything like that till the municipalities could cope with it, it was just gone. Then we had years of municipalities trying to figure out: "Where are we going? What are we doing? We've got to work with our neighbour, which affects that neighbour." So across the province this has been a mess.

Now, to their credit, municipalities are getting some sort of consensus in different regions. I truly think that I saw in my own riding certain developments that just popped up, divisions of quarter sections of land and 80 acres into three-acre parcels here and 10-acre parcels there that before would have had to go through some sort of planning commission. Now it just went through a board, and on that board could be your neighbour. It's hard for your neighbour to say: no, you can't have a second three-acre piece out of that 80 acres, because I know your daughter wants to get married and have that three-acre piece. It's really hard for your neighbour to say that. But if it's a planning commission, that distances itself from personalities, then you get a better plan across the province. I think that particular elimination of that regional planning was certainly a burden for municipalities and, I think, an unfair one. It did create a great deal of havoc across the province and maybe some lost opportunities and lost land that is now maybe not used for agricultural land, et cetera, et cetera. I think that is too bad.

Another thing certainly within my area as transportation critic is that the responsibility for bridge inspections has been downloaded onto local governments. Well, are we sure they're being done? Do municipalities have the money to make sure that those bridges are being inspected? Furthermore, where is the equipment that was provided to municipalities to do that inspection on wooden or steel bridges? I have concerns. Are those inspections even being done, and what happened to that equipment that used to provide that expertise? It's gone to the private sector, I would suppose, at a cut dollar, and that concerns me. I hope we don't have a bridge collapse before we figure out: oops, the government blew that one. That's another area that this kind of motion at least could prevent so that people would know what's happened.

A couple of other things that have been reduced drastically were FCSS, family and community support services, reduced by 23 percent, and the police assistance grant. You know, it's ironic that this government would try to pretend that they're tough on crime, and in reality they won't properly fund policing; in fact, a 50 percent reduction. Yet we expect our streets to be safer. We expect police to continue to do more work with less personnel and less money, and we expect their morale to be up. This is a definite downloading that I have grave concerns about. If we're going to appreciate the work that our police do, then we have to do more than lip service. We have to actually financially support them, and as a result of that, our communities will be safer. We can't think that when it comes to policing, they can be in three places at once,

especially in large rural ridings, where they are very much alone in some distant place. Without that support I don't know how they can possibly do their job safely.

The municipal waste and wastewater grants have fallen by 40 percent. Grant revenues in the city of Edmonton's operating budget were reduced 66 percent, and provincial grants to the city of Calgary fell 44 percent. Those are the two largest cities in our province. That's quite a cut, and when it just is a hodgepodge of fixing, it's not going to work. Then that forces the local governments – they have no choice but to raise property taxes, business taxes, have new user fees and licences, or reduce the level of service available to people in the communities. You know, it's hard to understand, when a provincial government has a huge surplus, why quality of life has to be affected so drastically in our province and how municipalities are forced to implement, you might say, the decisions of this government. I feel that this motion would particularly help those municipalities.

3:40

I want to speak for a moment about – you know, we hear about a grant going here and that a few bits of supplemental money have gone into onetime infrastructure dollars, \$130 million once: \$108 million from the lottery fund and \$22 million from the Alberta Liquor and Gaming Commission. You know what? Those are great. They need them. A little dash of money there and a little more money there. But, you know, it's like just putting your fingers in holes in the dike, and that's not going to solve the problem. If it's just a piecemeal approach to funding cuts, it's not going to work. It's like the squeaky wheel, and whoever squeaks the loudest, we'll give them a little money there and keep them happy: oh, they're squeaking; give them a little money. You know what? That's just not good planning. I know those dollars are appreciated and I know they're needed, but it also makes you wonder: is that how you appeal to a government, that if you're the squeaky wheel, then they'll throw you some money? That's not planning, and it's also not fair to municipalities, who try to work co-operatively with this government.

There are many municipalities who, I know, come in and will talk to different ministers and try to be really reasonable about the stress on their infrastructure and what's happening in their communities and the downloading and how they're trying to cope without raising taxes. We always hear that it's the same taxpayer, so why would this government allow municipalities to carry their burden? They have to raise taxes. Then, on the other hand, the provincial government says: yea, yea, we're billions of dollars ahead in our program. Yet municipalities have to say: well, we're in debt a little more; we're the hidden deficit, and we have to raise your taxes.

I know that those municipal governments try really hard to work with this government, and I also know they're feeling at times that they're not being listened to. All they're asking for is a plan. It's a word I don't think is defined over there very often, but I think it's a very legitimate concern they have. They just want a plan, a three-year rolling grant so that they can serve their people, who are our people. Why wouldn't this government want to work co-operatively rather than just dump their problems on the municipalities?

I also have grave concerns about the implications of VLT moneys and the bit of blackmailing that I felt went along in the last municipal election. It was implied, maybe not directly stated but certainly implied, that if you as a community voted to get rid of VLTs, you wouldn't get infrastructure dollars or you wouldn't have the same amount of lottery dollars back to your community. Everyone here knows that just the little lottery tickets, all those

lottery tickets, nothing to do with VLTs, would totally fund all the extra CFEP grants and the one-shot deals with money out of lottery dollars. That was covered years ago, long before VLTs came here, yet that was never made clear. But the impression was made that if you voted out VLTs, you would be punished. It was implied that your municipality would be punished if you voted . . . [interjections] Stand on a point of order if you've got a problem.

So, Mr. Speaker, that was the implication during that whole VLT debate and was, I thought, very poorly represented in the papers and alluded to by different members. I feel that's too bad, because those grants and those lottery dollars were available long before VLTs were here, and that was never made clear. I feel that was a misrepresentation to all the people of Alberta.

Actually I have several concerns, but I do want to conclude by saying that this is a good motion. This is something municipalities are looking for, and I think they deserve that kind of consideration from the people here in this Assembly and certainly from the government. I would hope that people would support this, because this is what municipal governance needs in order to do a good job. We ask for three-year business plans here. We ask for an idea of how you can plan your department, yet we don't do the same for municipalities. I think that's only fair. I think that's what this motion addresses. It isn't a bill that ties the government to action. It is a motion to say – I guess that would be an action – that they try to develop a plan that would introduce stable funding, and I think municipalities deserve nothing less.

Thank you.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of the motion, as I see it, is to set a framework that would see an increase in co-ordination between the Alberta government and municipal governments in terms of funding, roles and responsibilities, accountability, and infrastructure. A very admirable motion but not necessary, and I will explain.

But before I do, there are a couple of things I would just like to talk about that the hon. member opposite just talked about. If indeed you have good, solid land-use bylaws and policy in place, a municipality can say no to anyone, and you don't have to concern yourself with 10 acres here and 10 acres there, because in fact you do have it in your land-use bylaw.

Something else, too, hon. member. I'm sorry, but you have been misinformed on VLTs. Everyone in this province, regardless of whether they have the machines or not, will continue to receive a portion of the dollars.

My speech today is not focusing on the money aspect, because money, as in other departments within government, is not necessarily the be-all and end-all, and it won't fix everything. There are some things where we need procedural changes, and we need to look at how we plan and organize differently.

As sponsor of Bill 31, the Municipal Government Act, which was acted upon in 1995 and which was in keeping with a major consultation and what we heard, we redefined the framework for the provincial government's relationship with municipalities. We clarified the roles, responsibilities, and powers of municipalities and set parameters on financial administration in Alberta communities. The act defined the purpose of a municipality, provided municipalities with the capacity, rights, powers, and privileges of a natural person, and deregulated the process of governing. The act provided municipalities with the authority to function within a clearly defined framework of purpose, powers, and jurisdiction.

The municipalities in this province wanted the new Municipal Government Act.

There are several ways in which the province maintains funding arrangements with municipalities. In particular, part 8 of the Municipal Government Act outlines such arrangements for financial administration and budgeting. Part 9 does the same for taxation. The department's three-year business plans were introduced in 1994. Municipal Affairs' business plans provide funding stability for municipalities, enabling municipalities to forecast their budgets predictably. The Municipal Government Act sets out the roles and responsibilities of municipal councils, councillors, and chief administrative officers. In general, the process of governing was deregulated, thereby reducing the size and complexity of existing municipal legislation and enabling councils to respond to unforeseen conditions without the need for amending legislation. The act put more decision-making powers in the hands of local authorities, where it belongs.

Three-year business plans are prepared under the direction of the Minister of Municipal Affairs in accordance with the Government Accountability Act and the government's accounting policies. The plan enables both the provincial and municipal governments to identify what is expected of them. In addition, parts 7 and 13 of the Municipal Government Act specify varying aspects of a municipal government's accountability to the provincial government and to the public at large. Part 7 deals with public participation, including petitions, meetings with the public, and public hearings. Part 13 covers liability of municipalities, enforcement of municipal law, and other legal matters.

3:50

Several boards and agencies exist to deal with local governments and to work with local governments. The Municipal Government Board serves as a quasi-judicial tribunal to adjudicate matters specified under the Municipal Government Act, including appeals on property assessment, equalized assessment, linear property assessment, subdivisions involving provincial interest, intermunicipal disputes, conflicts between municipalities and housing authorities, annexation matters, and any other matters referred by the minister and/or Lieutenant Governor.

The local government advisory branch promotes and supports the improvement of municipal government in Alberta by providing municipal and financial advisory services to municipalities and improvement districts. The branch's core services include the delivery of the municipal corporate review program; administration of grants; the delivery of advisory services to municipal clients, including administering practices; financial grants and planning; development and implementation of information systems that provide relevant municipal information within the local government services division; collection of data and delivery of information systems that provide quality information to clients and management of national parks and IDs.

The local government development branch assists local governments in the areas of organizational projects, legislation, and research projects. The branch's core services include reviewing and drafting amendments to municipal legislation and regulations; providing analysis and policy advice on key municipal and planning issues; ensuring that the necessary information is available and that procedural requirements are met when a municipality incorporates or otherwise changes its status or area; assisting intermunicipal dispute resolutions and intermunicipal cooperation, including the development of regional services, commissions; and helping to ensure the adequacy and fairness of municipal legislation and regulation. These services in these branches work for and with municipalities.

Predicting the future roles, structures, and service delivery mechanisms of municipalities is similar to predicting the precarious performance of the stock market on just about any given day this last year. Significant uncertainties still exist at the local level regarding the overall rationale and purpose of municipalities. Have such uncertainties always existed? Yes, most definitely.

Please allow me to read into the record, Mr. Speaker, the following quote:

The world is too big for us. Too much is going on. Too many crimes. Too much violence and excitement. Try as you will, you get behind in the race in spite of yourself. It's an excessive strain to keep pace, and still you lose ground. Science emotes its discoveries on you so fast that you stagger beneath it in helpless bewilderment. The political world changes so rapidly - you can't keep track of who's in and who's out. Everything is high pressure. Human nature can't endure much more.

Sound familiar? This happened to have been published on June 16, 1833.

So what does this piece of history tell us? Are the opinions of 1833 relevant in today's world? Did the writer provide us with insight into our own future? Yes. Regardless of how or when we measure the circumstances, the efficiencies, the effectiveness under which municipalities function, survival, the very survival of municipalities is obvious.

The circumstances under which municipalities operate today and into the 21st century are and will be significantly different yet will remain somewhat similar with commonalities relevant to the transition from 1833. Municipalities can, in my estimation, invent their future through visionary leadership, proactive strategies, and adapting positively in changing times and circumstances.

How should local government planning be carried out? Let's talk about significant change. The changes we have undertaken in Alberta have not been incremental adjustments to current systems and programs but instead a complete re-examination of the role of government and the tools we use to deliver services. Because the scope of this change has been so broad, from health care and education to transportation and community services, it is no longer feasible for any level of government to develop plans for a single service or program in isolation. Fundamental change is now the agenda. Local government planning must also encompass a whole new service delivery mechanism, not just piecemeal it together.

Local governments can no longer afford to plan in isolation. The need to share resources and co-ordinate efforts is now. Personally - and I must stress this is personally - I am going to raise a few questions. Why is there still this unwillingness to collaborate and partner with neighbours or regions? We have been restructuring within government for five years and talking about regionalization and amalgamation, yet to date very few municipalities have decided to join together.

Is much of what is currently called planning really problem solving driven by an agenda set by current issues, or indeed is there long-range planning being done? Is there indeed a shared vision of a desired future? If so, why is consideration not given to combining forces? The AUMA and the AAMD and C becoming one association, working together, speaking with one voice and common purpose.

Today we still, in my estimation, have far too much municipal turf protection. We must be cognizant of the following.

The restructuring that has occurred in Alberta over the last five years is only the tip of the iceberg when considered in context with the long-term economic and financial restructuring occurring worldwide today. Our marketplace is now global. Are we prepared? Can we cope?

Recently the AUMA compiled a list of initiatives and policies that they would like to see us adopt. Many of their conclusions closely matched recommendations put forward at the Growth Summit. Many deal with the need for infrastructure: infrastructure maintenance, upgrading, and expansion; infrastructure financing that is ongoing, stable, and predictable: all initiatives that have been or will be addressed through the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure.

This government is committed to examining new and better ways to meet the infrastructure needs of all municipalities for all Albertans. In fact, the Premier just yesterday during question period assured this Assembly that he will be tabling all of the recommendations coming out of the Growth Summit and the government's response shortly. He further stated that a large percentage, probably 90 percent, have been accepted and will be acted upon.

In closing, I wish to reiterate my stand. We don't need to support this motion because we are already doing much of what it implies. This doesn't mean we are finished. No. We will continue to strive for improvement. We will continue to listen and co-ordinate our approach, working closely with our municipal counterparts. Mr. Speaker, I think Gord Graydon, a personal longtime friend of mine and now president of the AUMA, summed it up best when he was quoted last week in the *Calgary Herald* as saying, "We've had more access to the provincial government this year than we've ever had in our history." Gord, who is the current mayor of Grande Prairie, also said, "This is the beginning of a new era." Right on, Mr. Graydon. We're with you. This government is committed to enabling municipalities to achieve success and long-term prosperity by providing effective leadership and ongoing support. We do not need Motion 513 to accomplish these goals.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: May we have unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

head: **Introduction of Guests**
(*reversion*)

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Allan Jobson, an Alberta injured worker and an injured workers' advocate here in the province. He is in the public gallery, and with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would now ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**
4:00 (*continued*)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, believe it or not I agree with much of what the previous speaker, the Member for Lacombe-Stettler - have I got the riding right? - had to say about the state of municipalities and organizations these days, although I differ with her when it comes to supporting this motion for a number of reasons.

First of all, supporting or not supporting this motion is irrelevant, I think, to encouraging municipalities to co-operate under

umbrella organizations such as being discussed now for the Edmonton regional authority. Support for municipalities on an ongoing basis from the province, which has the ability to tax, compared to the municipalities, which have very small areas of taxation, seems to me – you know, I should learn to speak in sentences instead of paragraphs, because guess what I just did? I lost myself in that one. The point I was getting at is support for municipalities. Three-, five-year financial planning is irrelevant to them choosing to form into large umbrella organizations. Similarly, as the Member for Lacombe-Stettler said, organizations like the AUMA and the AAMDC – I had never thought of that before, but it strikes me right now that, gee, that probably would be a pretty useful idea. But again, support for this motion, which is asking for a longer term commitment from the province to the municipalities, is irrelevant to what organizations and cities and towns decide to do.

Now, I believe and I guess New Democrats believe that a new partnership is needed between Alberta municipalities and the provincial government. In particular, New Democrats believe that municipalities should be treated equitably by the province and not as objects of charity when it is deemed politically expedient by the provincial government. Being objects of charity usually happens in pre-election mode, six months before an election is called, but sometimes it can happen as a result of pressure points; that is, people standing up on their hind legs and fighting back. I don't think in this day and age that's a constructive use of time.

Before 1993 – remember, I was around – most provincial support for municipalities was provided in the form of unconditional grants. Now unconditional municipal assistance and transportation grants have been cut by an average of 70 percent since then. As a result, many municipalities are being forced to both make drastic service cuts and to raise taxes in order to offset the cuts in provincial funding. Within the past year the province has replaced some of this funding through onetime infrastructure grants, and that is what this motion is attempting to address. Yeah, nice. Thanks a lot. Well, you know, all of the municipalities will take the money, but they're not going to take the money and run. They actually have long-term projects that they would like to plan for, and they can't even do the planning or implement initial phases of those projects unless they know they can count on the money being there next year and the year after and the year after that. Onetime funding programs don't provide for the municipalities to do that planning with the confidence, also, that the money is going to be available.

They also don't provide municipalities with sufficient flexibility to determine their own capital and operating priorities. That's pretty important. I think everyone here seems to be singing off the same song sheet when they talk about local governments being closest to you, and that's true. They're closest to your day-to-day life. You know, if you've got a pothole, you don't call the province; you call the city. If someone's burning a fire in somebody else's backyard, you don't call the province or the feds; you call the city. Right? So they are very close.

Now, the New Democrats say multiyear funding for the municipalities in the form of unconditional grants should be restored. I remind you that that would just be going back to a system that was tried and true.

Let me point out some of the weaknesses in the absence of longer term provincial government commitments to funding, including the public transit operating grants. More and more we should be relying upon public transportation and less and less on our own individual vehicles. Public transit grants were extremely important in heading us in that right direction.

Another area that both the province and the city are looking at

right now is housing. Calgary has got such a housing crunch it's unbelievable. Even some middle-income Calgarians or people looking to move to Calgary can't because there's no place to rent or buy. In Edmonton a task force was struck yesterday by I believe the minister of social services. It includes one government MLA and one city councillor to co-chair and then a whole raft of members. But then I come in this morning, and reporters are shoving microphones in my face. "Hey, Pam, did you know what the social services minister said?" I said no. "He said: oh yeah, this task force on housing, very important, but don't expect any more money from the province nor any more shelters." I say, well, this is real bright. This is a government that's really gotten good at thinking and planning. They wait until after the snow flies and it's already gotten cold to announce a task force, and then they say: but by the way, don't expect any resources from the province in trying to accommodate your homeless.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I live right next door to the homeless. Actually, some homeless people live on the very hill – they live farther down in little dugouts – that I live on, less than a seven-minute drive from the Legislature. A lot more of them live at the bottom of Grierson Hill. I say in response to this anything but foresightful observation by this social services minister this morning: you know, the government is still sitting on properties that are unused. We're still renting and leasing at astronomical rates expensive properties in the downtown area to pay back somebody's buddies. I can't even remember who at this point.

DR. WEST: Be careful, Pam.

MS BARRETT: Oh, let me ask you a question then. Does the province now own the Federal Building?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

MS BARRETT: That's what I thought. [interjection] Yeah. Well, we've got the Federal Building sitting just up the street.

DR. WEST: It's your union friends that bugged it up.

MS BARRETT: The condo agreement? I don't know. I didn't have anything to do with that.

DR. WEST: Prairie Land developments.

MS BARRETT: I'm sorry. The Minister of Energy is accusing me and my friends of – I won't use the word that he's used, but anyway – messing up the deal that was, I guess, pending with Prairie Land developments, Prairie development corporation, something like that.

DR. WEST: Prairie Land.

MS BARRETT: It was Prairie Land, eh? Okay. And the government? Sorry. I don't know which friends of mine he's talking about, and I don't know about the deal.

DR. WEST: Well, you're NDP; aren't you?

MS BARRETT: Oh, yes. I'm NDP. I've always been NDP, despite the Health minister's attempt yesterday to cajole me into saying that NDP governments would sanction and license private, for-profit hospitals. Despite his attempts I'm NDP.

The point is that we've got this empty building sitting up the

road. I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure out that you open a section of it, you throw in some cots, you turn on the heat, provided the Energy minister isn't flicking that big provincial light switch on us all the time, put some blankets in, and you've got your homelessness problem solved. So for the province to say, "Well, you know, we're not going to provide any resources or assistance," I say, "Duh, then why have the task force?" This is a slap in the face.

Finally, I would say that social housing is an area that has been badly damaged in the last five years because of the funding cuts to municipalities. This may not be an issue in Redwater or Airdrie, but it is an issue in Edmonton and Calgary. I would like to see the city being able to provide more, meaning more of them, affordable social housing units to people who are of low income.

I must conclude the debate by saying, I guess, a pox on both houses, even though I'm going support this motion. Because, you know, I remember the 1993 election campaign. [interjection] Well, I participated but not on my own behalf. I remember the two political parties that landed here afterwards campaigning against each other. One was going to have brutal cuts, and the other was going to have vicious cuts I think.

MR. DUNFORD: Massive.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, advanced education. You were massive; they were brutal.

So when I hear the member sponsoring this motion on behalf of her colleague talking about how dare this government cut 50 and 60 percent out of municipalities, I'm left to wonder how a Liberal government would have achieved exactly what they said they were going to achieve unless they had done the same thing: cuts to health care, cuts to education, cuts to municipalities. In fact, I interpret the adjective "brutal" as being much worse than "massive." I know the Minister of Energy doesn't like my politics, and that's fine. I don't like his. But at least I'll say one thing: if you're principled on an issue and principled in your party, then stick to your principles and don't try to play both sides of the fence. [some applause] Thank you.

On that note, I'm going to play both sides of the fence, because I do agree with some of the observations by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler. At the same time, I am going to support this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Motion 513, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning. The motion is to develop a framework for provincial and municipal relations. This in itself is an excellent idea for co-operation and co-ordination between provincial and municipal governments. However, the four areas that the motion encompasses are presently addressed by this government through the Department of Municipal Affairs. Therefore, this motion clearly dictates duplication rather than providing new and innovative ways of doing things.

Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Government Act redefined the framework for the provincial government's relationship with municipalities and set parameters on financial administration in Alberta's municipalities. This addresses the first part of the motion, namely "stable and predictable funding arrangements."

Since 1993 the government has been working closely with

municipalities and their associations to reduce the provincial debt and eliminate wherever possible any overlap in service delivery at the provincial and municipal levels. With the implementation of three-year business plans, municipalities have been able to predict with some degree of accuracy the grants they will receive. These business plans also define and enhance departmental accountability in its relationship with local governments.

The government, in response to concerns about maintaining local service levels, has developed a range of targeted, conditional grants to reduce municipal infrastructure problems resulting from new industrial and commercial projects. These grants will improve provincial and municipal accountability by setting and monitoring criteria for grant use. The government also has approved a targeted municipal grant program to aid municipalities where municipal growth, changes in local economies, and current taxation levels have made it difficult financially to maintain current services and meet new demands.

Mr. Speaker, the second item addressed by this motion is clarifying the role and responsibilities of the two levels of government. It is likely that clarifying these roles would result in a redefinition of roles and responsibilities as currently understood and thus negate all the constructive work that has been done to date. This government has successfully removed most of the overlap and duplication in governance between the two levels of government. The results have been positive, and municipal and provincial governments now understand their complementary roles. There is no reason to go backwards.

Alberta Municipal Affairs has been actively trying to encourage municipalities, through reviews such as the capital region governance review, to co-operate and collaborate on service delivery, engage in business planning, and develop creative economical solutions to service issues. These initiatives will help reduce the impact of changes on municipal grants and other forms of funding for municipalities.

With respect to the accountability framework suggested in the motion, Mr. Speaker, this is already provided for through the department's three-year business plans. These business plans are prepared in accordance with the Government Accountability Act. Parts 7 and 13 of this act specify aspects of a municipal government's accountability to the provincial government and to taxpayers.

Municipalities have taken their share of the burden in getting the province's fiscal house in order. The Alberta government is committed to working closely with municipalities to help with the fiscal challenges they are facing. Provincial funding is being focused more on specific programs that reflect the priorities of Albertans and less on unconditional funding to local governments.

The final point in the motion refers to infrastructure priorities for local communities. This is a very logical concern considering the excellent levels of economic growth achieved by this province in recent years. Substantial growth like the kind Alberta has experienced is bound to put greater demands on infrastructure within the province. The Alberta government is committed to meeting these demands by assessing infrastructure priorities through such mechanisms as the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure.

In August of this year, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government announced a \$150 million per year increase in transportation funding over the next three years. This decision was based on recommendations brought forward by the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure. The task force also agreed to allocating a onetime injection of \$130 million from the Alberta lottery fund to cost-shared municipal transportation programs. This represented a total transportation reinvestment of \$580 million in new money over four

years and an increase in the province's current municipal transportation commitment of more than 50 percent. The onetime allocation in funding to municipalities was heavily focused on the increasing pressures of growth on municipalities, such as population, traffic, public transit, and economic activity.

In addition, targeted grants to municipalities have been developed primarily by Alberta Transportation and Alberta Municipal Affairs to address specific infrastructure problems and to ensure that temporary changes in municipal economies and growth do not adversely affect municipal viability. Mr. Speaker, examples include the resource roads grant, the street improvement program grant, and the Municipal 2000 sponsorship grant. The use of targeted municipal grants also enhances both provincial and municipal accountability by setting and monitoring criteria for grant use.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to elaborate further on the Municipal 2000 sponsorship grant. About 300 Alberta municipalities are eligible to apply for a conditional grant under this program. The program is aimed at promoting excellence in local government and provides \$10 million each year over the next three years for new and innovative projects that focus on improving municipal governance or administration, municipal service delivery, and municipal economic viability. The program is also designed to encourage municipalities to be good neighbours and work together. The program will give small- and medium-sized municipalities help and encouragement to try innovative and co-operative ways to improve services for Albertans. The program is part of the Alberta government's commitment to increased targeted support to municipalities.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Municipalities play a major role in achieving the Alberta advantage by providing Albertans with infrastructure and services that are required for a good quality of life. The government strives for continual improvement in these areas, and new initiatives are under way to review the roles and responsibilities of the provincial and municipal governments. The Alberta government recognizes that there still may be opportunities for streamlined and improved co-ordination of program delivery at the local level.

Mr. Speaker, as the province has and is developing programs which address Motion 513's concerns, I would advocate that the government reject this motion.

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

MR. WHITE: It's a shame that the members opposite seem to be blinded by the fact that they sit on that side of the House. They go to an AUMA meeting and don't hear a thing. Totally and completely missed it. I don't know where they were. Certainly the Member for Lacombe-Stettler had mentioned that the now president, the mayor from Grande Prairie, said some nice words to the press, but I mean, gee, this government holds all the strings. And the Member for Leduc is saying: yes, it's wise and it's just; it's a wise thing to do for this government to dole out grants on a needs basis, on a targeted nothing. I mean, there's absolutely no respect for that level of government from this one. Absolutely none. That's fundamentally what we're talking about here, giving them an opportunity to do what they know they can do.

4:20

You and you and you, a lot of people on the other side of the

House, have come through that level of government, and you know exactly what I'm talking about, that this level of government is way off there under this magic dome and the money comes out who knows where. It just sort of comes out in little bits and pieces targeted for some bureaucrat's idea of a special placement area based on population and based on all kinds of factors that they can manipulate.

Now, listen. What you really want to do in this government to get the most value out of those people that you know and I know are good and true people – they're those that were described earlier by the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View as those ordinary people doing extraordinary things. I've met those people. I know those people. They get into a municipal level of government for whatever reason, generally to do good for their neighbours, and they find they're doing extraordinary things. They are performing. It is by far the most efficient level of government that I know of. I've seen this one in operation and that level too, yet this government treats them like poor children. It doles out funds and doesn't give them any respect. What should be done to respect that level of government is to give them a reason to operate on the revenue side the same way they do on the expense side, manage it very well.

Now, if this government was reasonable, it would certainly say to the calls from the mayor of Calgary and other members of that council that there is a need for some more funding, and that's what they're saying. They attach it, rightfully or wrongfully – it can be debated of course – to a provincial fuel tax that would of course, if it was delivered on a per capita basis, short the rural areas, and the rural areas definitely need some areas in the way of funding for transportation. But this is a call gone out to you – and every one of you have heard it – that there is some need for this respect so that the management of those peoples can be done quite properly.

Now, when you go these meetings, either the AAMD and C or the AUMA, simply ask them if they could deal with an expansion of their expenditures and the shrinking of their expenditures if it relied on a tax or some kind of funding that expanded and contracted. They'll say: absolutely yes; we have a long list of capital and operating expenses that we'd like to do, and they're on our priority list; unfortunately, we can never afford them. That is the absolute truth.

We have a hidden deficit here. The member that formerly sat in front of me here that is now on the other side went at great lengths to talk about a hidden deficit, and he's absolutely right. He was right then, and I suspect he still is right now. The hidden deficit is not at this level of government. It's not a number that the Premier or the Treasurer can lay out and say: that's what the deficit is. This is a deficit out that door and two blocks west of here. There are some sewers that have been there for 90 years, and they're barely hanging in there. Now, if you continue to replace those in bits and pieces, it'll end up costing you the same as it would to repair Steve West's old Chev that he used to drive. He got rid of it; he got a new one. Why? Because he couldn't afford to keep the old one. That's what this government is doing to municipal governments, forcing those bits and pieces all the way along the line to maintain an infrastructure, and it's an error of colossal proportions.

This government treats the municipal level of government the same way this government perceives the federal government treats them, with contempt. I can say to this government that you're darn lucky the people of this province entrust the municipal level of government to very responsible people who do not fly off the handle at the provincial level of government and really tell them what they think. At least they don't do that until they retire, and it's fortunate, because the level of acrimony would be too much for

this government to take and would certainly punish those communities.

Another element of this particular motion is accountability. Municipalities would be more than happy to be accountable if they had some funds to be accountable for, but in fact this level of government pushes property tax to the extent that it penalizes those that wish to upgrade their properties. There is no relationship between property tax and the deliverance of service, absolutely none. It's just that the municipal level of government is the only method of funding, and they have to finance things that are totally unrelated to property value, which are social services, library services, ancillary health care, and recreational services. It's totally outside the realm that should be governed by a municipal government.

Now, in other parts of the world, notably England, of course there is no provincial government, which would be a blessing to the municipalities.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

[Motion lost]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Rather than calling Motion 514, would the Assembly agree to proceeding with the next item of business under government business?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

head: **Government Motions**
Committee Membership Changes

32. Mrs. Nelson on behalf of Mr. Havelock moved:
Be it resolved that the following changes to the following committees be approved by the Assembly: on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services that Mr. Gibbons replace Ms Olsen, on the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices that Ms Olsen replace Mr. Sapers, on the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts that Mr. Sapers replace Mr. Zwozdesky, and on the Select Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund that Mr. Bonner replace Mr. Zwozdesky.

[Motion carried]

Chief Electoral Officer Appointment

33. Mrs. Nelson on behalf of Mr. Havelock moved:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the report of the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee and recommend that Mr. O. Brian Fjeldheim be appointed as Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND Party.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to address this motion in some detail. I was privileged to be on the – aw, I need my reading glasses. Hang on. I never remember the names of

these things. They go on too long. We're too verbose in our committee names. It was the Select Special Chief Electoral Officer Search Committee, kind of a subcommittee of Legislative Offices. For the longest time in my years here between 1986 and 1993 I never got to serve on the Legislative Offices Committee, and what a pity. My buddy Derek Fox always took that wonderful committee, and now I know why.

I'd like to describe the process that we went through in recommending that we hire Brian Fjeldheim and hope that all members will concur in our report and our recommendation. We did advertise provincially. We advertised on the Net as well, and we actually got about 70 applications I believe. We did the usual process of having staff go through them and segregate them into categories and so forth. The nicest day of the whole process was the day we interviewed our final candidates, all of whom brought some very special qualities to the table.

But it wasn't until we were interviewing Brian Fjeldheim himself that I really came to understand how the office of Chief Electoral Officer has changed since I first got involved in politics in 1968. Sorry. Well, I got involved in '65, but '68 was the first campaign I worked.

MS OLSEN: Are you that old?

MS BARRETT: Yeah, I know. I'm telling my age now; aren't I? Oh, yeah. But I did work for the NDP.

MS OLSEN: I didn't know.

MS BARRETT: Yes. I did work for the NDP. Always have.

DR. TAYLOR: Shame. Shame.

MS BARRETT: Oh, I'm proud of it. Absolutely proud of it.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are on Motion 33?

4:30

MS BARRETT: I absolutely am. I'm on the Chief Electoral Officer motion. You bet.

Nowadays when you've got boundary changes, because of the population difference – I mean, I can't remember what the population of the city of Edmonton was in 1968, but let me hazard, I don't know, maybe 150,000 in the city proper. Well, when you had boundary changes, it was not that difficult to shift things around. With the population being so much bigger and with requirements to comply with our Charter of Rights, that each person has the right to the equivalent of one person, one vote, meaning that our ridings have to be much more equitable in size – the job falls to the Chief Electoral Officer.

Nowadays you use a computer to do things. You would think that would make it easier. In fact, because it makes it easier, whenever the Electoral Boundaries Committee comes to you asking for changes, they get into a minutia of detail because they think it's going to be easier. I ought to know because I have served on an Electoral Boundaries Committee, and obviously – well, maybe it's not obvious. As a matter of fact I was part of a minority report because I didn't like the incredible detail that that committee at that time was asking of the Chief Electoral Officer.

Another factor that's much more important now, I would argue, compared to the '60s is the role of the returning officers and the deputy returning officers. People are often now asked to vote on more than one issue on a given ballot. We saw that just a few

weeks ago when Albertans were asked to go and waste their time to vote for a senator-in-waiting, or two of them as a matter of fact. Well, you know, I had to go to the Chief Electoral Officer and say: "How do I spoil my ballot? And if I spoil my ballot in one area, does that mean I'm going to spoil my ballot in all the other areas?" They have to anticipate the need for these things these days. They have to design forms differently. I believe our forms in the city of Edmonton were designed by the city, but in fact it's the Chief Electoral Officer's office itself that designs them for most voting areas for the municipal elections which we just went through.

By the way, I didn't spoil my ballot. I didn't have to. I found out that all you have to do is just leave it blank and it's considered the equivalent of spoiling or a no vote, which I found even more convenient. I know that only half the people in the province voted on that particular section of the ballot, so it confirmed what I believed. People would rather be electing their regional health authorities than they would senators-in-waiting.

To return to what I was saying earlier, the returning officers are really public information officers, and the kind of training they get is reflected in the service they can give to the public, similarly the enumerators. I talked to one enumerator who went three times to one senior citizens' residence to make sure that she got everybody enumerated. As a result, she got a lot of stories that she brought to me wondering if I could use them, because these seniors were saying: oh, I've lost so much of my income support from the province that now I have to go to the food bank towards the end of the month because my pension isn't enough to keep me going; it's either that or I don't pay my rent. Anyway, she would pick up stories like this just by doing the enumerating. This woman's name was Colleen, and I thought, you know, she was obviously trained by a good returning officer. Yes, you're being paid to collect each name, address, phone number, and so forth, but she was trained to be sensitive, to not just knock, knock, knock, "I'm here from the government and I'm here to help you; give me your name and your address," and run away. She obviously hung around and listened, and I thought: that's the sign of someone who has been well trained. Well, who is it who trains those returning officers? I can tell you who it is. It's the Chief Electoral Officer.

I also know what happens when people are not well trained. There is misinformation. People are told to go to the wrong polling station, and they can be treated in a fashion that is not worthy of the title of public service.

DR. TAYLOR: Cavalier fashion.

MS BARRETT: A cavalier fashion. Thank you, minister of information, science, and technology. Have I got that right? See; I told you these titles are too long. I'm going to shrink 'em back down.

Yeah, treated in a cavalier fashion. That's one of the reasons that I'm speaking so extensively about this motion. It's because I have such confidence in the person who is now occupying that position and has done so since October 1.

All of us at that table could tell that this is a man of compassion. He cares for his staff, loves to deal with volunteers – and remember, returning officers for the most part are acting as volunteers – loves to meet the enumerators. He loves to work on the computer, enjoys the challenge, and this guy is hands on. Some of the stuff that he talked about in that interview – I wish you could tape those interviews because it was so informative. I can't remember all the detail he gave us about that computer system, but it's absolutely fascinating. I mean, if he adjusts the population even by 1 or 2 percent, the computer says: oh well, the river is going to get in the

way, but so what? So what if these people have to drive 30 or 50 K to go and vote? He says to himself: I've got to override that computer every time; I have to look and use my judgment if I need to adjust this to conform to law or the most recent Electoral Boundaries Committee. Then, you know, the computer just arbitrarily says: well, that percentage now has to go in the next-door riding, and so what if there's a river in the way? Well, he enjoys the challenge of figuring out how he can tell the computer to try a different adjustment or how he himself can look at the map to make a different adjustment so that people are not inconvenienced when it's time to go out and vote.

The other thing that really impressed me about Brian Fjeldheim was his concern about the way the federal government has collected enumeration data and how he believes that Alberta can take and has taken a much better approach, a much more comprehensive approach and one which answers to us locally. So he's looking at all times at not just the provincial but all the municipal boundaries as well, looking to make sure that people don't have far to go and, as I said earlier, looking to make sure that the ballots are readable and understandable, not that I think he very often gets phoned by people saying, "How do I spoil my ballot?" But it's important to be able to answer that question.

Let me conclude by reiterating what a wonderful experience it was to be on the committee. I have been on – oh, I don't know – half a million, three-quarters of a million committees in this Legislature or, as Newfies would say, a t'ousand at least, and not a one has proven to be such a positive experience. I was on a committee one time when we traveled the province – believe me, electoral boundaries came up in this one as well – at the time that we were reviewing the Meech Lake accord. [interjection] Yeah, you wouldn't believe the Meech Lake accord and electoral boundaries. Believe me, it came up. I've been on some pretty arduous and demanding committees, and I've been on some pretty routine ones, but this is the one I've enjoyed the most out of all my years serving in the Legislature as an MLA. If I had known that Derek Fox was going to be on the best committee – I was the Opposition House Leader – I think I would have traded places with him, but I didn't know.

However, I do know now, so I'm going to ask the hon. Acting Government House Leader to not entertain a motion to get me off this committee, and again I urge all members to support the recommendation. Anybody who goes over to that office of the Chief Electoral Officer can see that it's a great atmosphere. It clicks and hums along. They have lots to do in between elections, and their new boss is absolutely ideal for the job he's in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I had the privilege of serving on the special committee as well that reviewed résumés and then interviewed candidates for the position of Chief Electoral Officer of the province, and I'd like to wish Brian Fjeldheim all the best of success as he assumes his responsibilities. It is perhaps one of the most challenging positions that any individual can find themselves in, having to balance all of the responsibilities and pressures of the office with all of the requests that will be flying at him and his staff from all directions, from every participant in the political contests which he must oversee. Of course, the participants in those political contests will be seeking every possible legitimate advantage they can, and then of course it is the Chief Electoral Officer's job to separate the inappropriate from the appropriate requests, act on the appropriate ones, and gently send

others on their way.

Mr. Speaker, it's a tribute to Mr. Fjeldheim that he is willing to take on the role, and as a member of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices of course I'll have an opportunity to meet with him from time to time as he progresses in his role. I look forward to receiving his reports, and I look forward to the experience of him overseeing the next general election, whenever that may be.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried]

Adjournment of Session

34. Mrs. Nelson moved on behalf of Mr. Havelock:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the fall sitting of the Second Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, here we are, the first day back after . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: The second day.

MRS. SOETAERT: The second day back, but the motion was yesterday. I should have clarified that.

The first chance that we were back in the Leg. yesterday, mere minutes – mere minutes – and what does the House leader from over there do? He moves a motion to leave. Only in Alberta I bet that happens. I bet that happens only in Alberta, because they don't like sitting. [interjection] Oh, in other places too? Maybe. Possibly. Now I'm conversing with the chair. Name names. I'd like to know. So you know, Mr. Speaker, you sit here and you think: how can we on the first day back have a motion to leave? It's appalling.

There was a poll done – I think it was in the States – where the people with the lowest regard of all professions were politicians. I felt bad hearing that, and I'm sure everyone else in here who heard that felt bad too. You know, when we see political jokes at our expense, it should hurt, because we should all be trying our very best and giving countless hours to represent our constituents. Now, my constituents are very astute, of course, and they know when we are in session and out of session. In fact, they think – some think; not all of them – that the only time we work is when we are in session. Everyone in here knows that's not true, that we all put in long hours all the time. However, democracy is best served when we're in here because democracy, flawed as it is, is the best system we have. [interjection] I just know the minister is going to speak next about this motion because he likes to participate when I am speaking. [interjection] The minister of blackouts, yeah. [interjections] I'll withdraw that remark. I'll just withdraw it. It's just easier, but it isn't as much fun.

So, Mr. Speaker, we best serve democracy when we are in this Legislature. It's interesting that if you were to look at *Hansard*, nobody over there ever debates anything. They don't express their opinion. And you know what? I hope they express it within their caucus. But hello; democracy is in this building amongst all the members of the Legislature, and you should be able to bring forth your concerns and your opinions in here, not just be muzzled on the

back row of a government bench. You should be able to speak up in here. That is how democracy is best served: when we speak up here.

You know, Mr. Speaker, here we go. We've got a fall session, a short one. Maybe two, three weeks. The Premier was here yesterday. He was, but I'm not speaking about today. [interjections] You're right. I was mentioning that he was here yesterday.

There are several questions that it would be nice if they were answered, but that doesn't always happen. So we will continue to ask them to different members over there, certainly questions about the West Edmonton Mall loan guarantee. How can we ask those questions and get answers unless we sit in here? This is the best place to ask those questions. That's why I'm opposed to this motion that we right away close the Leg. before we've even started.

I think, too, that there are more questions about health and health care that deserve to be asked. I see that money went to the Grey Nuns to open up more beds. That was good. But you know what? Sturgeon hospital was phased back at those reduced bed-funding levels – it's hard to get back into the correct terminology for all of these – without all the levels of care that they used to have prior to the '93-94 cuts, yet they're serving more and more people. Why? We need time to ask those questions, and more importantly we'd like some answers, but usually they aren't there.

What about education? We certainly need to ask questions in here about education and about the underfunding of education. One of my children is in high school, and not one of her classes is under 34 children. That's appalling. It's an excellent high school where people are working very hard. They're doing their best to manage with all these cuts that have happened, yet my child in grade 10 is not in one class of less than 34 children. That's unforgivable.

So I think those questions have to come up. Certainly if we don't sit in this Legislature longer than a day or two or three, those questions won't be answered. [interjection] Well, let's talk about advanced ed, Mr. Speaker. There are questions that certainly deserve to be asked about that. At the rate the ministers wax eloquent or ineloquent or however they answer their questions – and it takes forever to answer to say nothing. If it were a succinct answer, we would be able to ask those questions. But if it's a short session – heavens, the motion is already on the paper – how will we get all those concerns out?

The issue of downloading to municipalities: I think those questions have to be asked, yet will we have time to ask them? I doubt it very much. The blackouts and the brownouts and the lack of – I wonder if anybody will ask the question: will the Christmas lights around the Leg. be turned on at 5 o'clock at night or just 8 o'clock? That's going to be an interesting one for me but one I wouldn't waste valuable question period time asking. I might just send a note over to the minister. I know he'd respond. Certainly that might be one that should be debated in here a bit. I mean, Scrooge has hit the Leg, so that is really, really sad.

Mr. Speaker, you know what else? I think there are more transportation issues that have to be asked. I really do. The level of inspections and what's happening, the reality that highway 794 – now the municipality is asking for it to be a resource road so that the government pays 100 percent instead of 75 percent. While they do that little debate, I'd like some confirmation from this government that construction will continue and pavement will go down on 794 despite the communication back and forth between the municipality and the province. I have actually a really good question, but I'm going to save it for question period because I know I'll get my opportunity if they don't speak too long answering the question. I'll save that other transportation question for them.

I was pleased to hear the question about hog producers today,

because if you were to read the *Journal* last Saturday, that was a picture of a farmer in my constituency who is losing his farm because of the drop in hog prices. The other people who commented in that article who remain nameless, those are people in my constituency, and I was glad to see that question asked. I wasn't satisfied with all the answers, and I'm hoping there's a follow-up tomorrow, because you can't make light – certainly we don't on this side – of the reality of family farms and what's happening to them. We're losing them in this province, and if all we want is the big corporations to come in and huge, huge hog operations instead of the family farm, then you're talking about quality of life in rural Alberta.

Now, if those things aren't important enough to sit in the Legislature – I think they are. I think we have to take the time, and that's why I'm opposed to this motion. You don't come in the first day, after a long half a year's break from the Leg., and put in a motion to end the session. I think that just says that we don't care about democracy here. We don't care how many questions you want to ask. We don't care about the concerns of Albertans. We don't want to hear them in here, and we don't want to answer questions about them. So as soon as we get in here, we're going to make a motion to leave, just to show our arrogance to the public. That's exactly what that motion does on the very first day back. So that's why I am opposed to that motion.

There are several other areas.

AN HON. MEMBER: Tell us.

4:50

MRS. SOETAERT: I will tell you some of them. Quite honestly, the minister responsible for science, research, and technology and I met with Dr. Locksley McGann about his program out of the U of A. I want to know what happened with that, where that funding is going, what's happening. Are we making more progress? It's amazing, the work that is done there. Amazing, the work. I want some answers about that, and I don't think I'll find it on a disk that he tables. So I would like that opportunity. And you know what? Half the time what's really neat about session is some of the conversations you can have with the ministers because they're there. They're there. You don't have to go through a bunch of channels, through a bunch of bureaucracy. [interjection] Well now, the Member for Stony Plain, the hon. minister of public works, I see him probably more than we would both like, Mr. Speaker. [interjection] Wrong. I withdraw that one. Jeez, I'm in trouble. But the minister and I see each other often because we do have neighbouring constituencies and we have similar concerns.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: I thought that you liked me.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's not just because I like him, no. I would like that clarified. I'm sure in another life we might get along just fine, but right now . . . [interjection] No. There are others who think that. No. Possibly not.

I'd like to focus on this motion. I am sure the minister of public works deep down probably said: don't put that motion on the first day; I want to stay in there.

MR. SAPERS: He was at the cabinet table demanding that.

MRS. SOETAERT: I think he was at the cabinet table demanding "Don't put in that motion the first day" and got outvoted, which is sad to see, for my colleague from Stony Plain to get outvoted within his caucus and cabinet, but so be it. Mind you, we are

getting a hospital in Stony Plain. I suppose he'll want his picture on the door for that; nonetheless, we're glad it's there.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to speak to this motion today. There were people in our caucus that said: who wants to speak to this? I did. I said to put me at the top of the list. I want this government to know that it's arrogant to make a motion to close the session on the first day back after half a year away. You know what? It is arrogant, and people out there do know that, that we barely get back and they want to be gone. That's wrong, and it does not serve democracy well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak briefly to this routine motion. I don't think it deserves a whole lot of debate, so I won't be speaking at length. I do want to point out that this is a very routine motion. This is a motion that is debated by the Legislature every time the session sits. You have the motion on the record so that at the end of the business of the Legislature it's available to the members so they can adjourn the business of the House and get back to their constituencies and do the hard work that we all do in our constituencies when the House is not sitting.

I have a suggestion to the opposition, because I remember that we went through this last time. We've gone through it several times. Every time it comes up, we go through this prolonged debate which makes no sense at all. I have a suggestion to the members. Because this is a routine procedural motion, I would suggest that the next time the Legislature looks at the Standing Orders, we simply add a Standing Order to our Standing Orders that applies to the adjournment of the House, and then we could just refer to a Standing Order and adjourn. We really need not go through this ridiculous charade of debating a routine procedural motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that I've been absolutely provoked to speak to this motion. I can't believe the arrogance of the attitude of the Member for Medicine Hat. But to tell you the truth, it's absolutely reflective of the arrogance that we have seen from this government since they have been elected, since 1993. There is absolutely no regard for the legislative process. There is absolutely no regard for the need and necessity of legislative sittings in this province in terms of putting the business of the government before the people.

MR. SAPERS: They call democracy "dome disease."

MS CARLSON: They call democracy disease. That's a very good point.

The fact is that this is the only opportunity that most people in this province have to view the proceedings in this Legislature, to really take a look at what that front bench over there is doing when they spend the billions and billions of dollars they collect every year from every single taxpayer in this province. Mr. Speaker, it is appalling to think that we would be at a stage in this Legislative Assembly where we would have the Member for Medicine Hat stand up and flippantly say that this is a routine motion that does not deserve a great deal of debate. When a motion like this is brought in on the very first day of a fall sitting to be debated less than 24 hours later, it deserves a great deal of debate. In fact, I think the debate should be prolonged until a point in time when we can go out and actually accumulate some evidence from constituencies that

says that people do not like this.

MRS. SOETAERT: I could stay till Christmas. My shopping is done.

MS CARLSON: That's true. I could easily stay till Christmas too. My shopping is also done.

MR. BONNER: We need to have a summit.

MS CARLSON: No, we don't need a summit on whether or not this should be shut down. But it should be the kind of debate that is had after full and due process has occurred in this Legislative Assembly, when everybody, all members on both sides of the House, are fully satisfied that everything that needs to be examined, that every proceeding that this government has entered into in this fiscal year has been examined to the fullest extent of the need. I'll tell you that that's one of the reasons why this government wants out of here, Mr. Speaker: because they know they cannot withstand that kind of scrutiny. We have already seen that happen, and it is why we have a Premier who shows up for the first day of sitting.

Speaker's Ruling Referring to the Absence of Members

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, we've had a couple of people who are skating on it. It's clearly a matter of *Beauchesne*, if you want to read at 289. When you read it, you'll say that members are very busy. A number of members have mentioned that they are very busy and in so doing reflect that all members are busy. Members by tradition are in various places working on behalf of their parties, their government, and it is improper and unworthy to mention the absence of any member. If we could reflect upon that in continuation on your motion.

MS CARLSON: You're absolutely right, Mr. Speaker.

Debate Continued

MS CARLSON: There are many issues in this Legislature that need to be fully debated, and we have seen some of them arise so far in question period. West Edmonton Mall is an issue that needs to be fully disclosed to the public of this province, and in fact over the many years that I have been in this Legislature, that has never been done. We are just now beginning to scratch the surface of that issue, Mr. Speaker.

It is an issue that because of the reluctance of the government to discuss it at various stages over the years and in questions in this Legislature and I'm sure in the questions that are to come, we need as much time as it takes to fully debate that. And if that means we go past Christmas and we go into the next year, then I have no problem with that, because people in this province need to know how their taxpayer dollars were spent. They need to know exactly what the process is in government so that a decision like interfering with Alberta Treasury Branches can be made. How can it be that members in the government knew or did not know about what was going on in that case? How can it be that we've got ministers absolutely going against what they stated government policy was and not creating a level playing field for all businesses in this province, not even creating a level playing field in the banking industry in this province because there was political interference in terms of what went on in those loans? We have seen that in affidavits, Mr. Speaker. We have seen that in the flip-flopping kinds of answers that we have inside and outside of this House from the Premier, from the Treasurer, and from other members associ-

ated with these loans over the years, and the people of this province want to know what's going on.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, they cannot know fully. It will never be fully disclosed when we see this kind of a motion brought into this Legislature for debate within 24 hours of our coming into a fall session. This is the kind of motion that should be brought in at the end of a series of debates. Let's have this on day 34 or 36 of the fall sitting, when we have had an opportunity . . . [interjection] You laugh. You laugh. You think that's funny, but you know what? It's only funny to you guys. It isn't funny to the people of this province. It's only the irreverent attitude that we have seen this entire government take towards the legislative process that allows them to see that something like this is funny. There are many, many issues that we are never even going to scratch the surface on in this fall session.

MRS. SOETAERT: What about the environment, Debby?

MS CARLSON: I haven't even got started on the environment yet.

There are all kinds of issues happening in this Legislature that need to be discussed in that regard. We have a special places process that is no longer special in this province, Mr. Speaker, because the Minister of Environmental Protection has changed the mandate of that process. What they're doing in that process is facilitating their own needs; they are not facilitating the environmental needs of this province. It's a matter that needs to be fully debated.

We have a bill coming up that would have an opportunity to be debated, Mr. Speaker, if we were going to be in here longer, but when, first of all, they postpone the process until the second week in November with the full intention of getting out before Christmas, when they bring in a motion to adjourn on the very first day of the sitting, we know for sure that we are not going to get that bill, Bill 218, that deals with environmental protection, which is only the third bill that should be coming up this fall. We know that we're not even going to have a chance to debate that bill.

MRS. SOETAERT: Shameful.

MS CARLSON: It is shameful.

MRS. SOETAERT: We should sit longer.

MS CARLSON: Absolutely we should sit longer, but this adjournment motion is a way for this government to slip out at the last minute when they don't feel like sitting here any longer because they feel they've got better things to do. We have heard members on that side of the House say many, many times that they do not feel that sitting in this Legislative Assembly is a part of fulfilling their commitment to their constituents. We have heard them say that shorter sittings are better, that people in here get dome disease, that the best place for them to be is out in their constituency, and that the way for the business of this Assembly to be conducted, in many cases, is through DAOs and other kinds of committees.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't think that that's what the people of the province think. They want to know what's going on. How is their money being spent? Give them an opportunity to come in here and watch in the galleries in the afternoons and in the evenings, to come and see every single bill debated to the fullest extent, to see some sort of participation from that side of the House. We have these bills that come in here, and we don't see participation from

government members. Well, when I'm in my constituency, people want to know why government members don't debate the bills. We have one or two speakers because they have nothing to say or because perhaps they're not allowed to say anything. We don't know the answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, because nobody stands up here and speaks to those issues. One or two speakers and that's it. The issue doesn't get fully debated in that regard. We have a lot of the province who doesn't get heard from. They tell me that in fact they do that kind of discussion in caucus meetings and through the standing policy committees, but the fact is that it isn't public debate. It isn't on the record. It isn't in *Hansard* for people to come back and historically review what has happened, what the debate has been and participate in that in their own regard by being able to call their MLAs and have them express their views here.

Now, as it stands, if people have an opposing view to what the government bill says, Mr. Speaker, they need to go outside of their constituency in many cases and bring the information to MLAs who are opposition MLAs in order to have their voices heard in this Legislature. We see that happen all the time in the petitions that we present, in the various letters that are tabled in this Assembly, and in fact those people don't have as strong a voice as they would have if these members would withhold this kind of motion to adjourn the Legislative Assembly and fully participate at every opportunity in the kind of discussion that needs to be going on in here.

Mr. Speaker, there are a number of serious issues that need to be debated that are really emergency items. Health care in this province is in just a huge chaotic situation. I was in Calgary this morning attending a meeting with a number of businesswomen and women who work in the public sector, and their first question was: what's happening on Bill 37? They're getting conflicting information. They say that on one hand the government says: everything's okay; trust me. Every time they've done that in health care so far, hospitals blow up and nurses are laid off and things like that happen.

So they're saying: should we trust this government on this bill one more time? Well, of course you can imagine what our answer is. We don't believe it.

AN HON. MEMBER: No.

MS CARLSON: That's right. Our answer is no, because we believe that Bill 37 opens a very wide door for private health care to enter into this province and set up a two-tiered system where the administrative costs of the system we have will become exorbitant, where people in this province will no longer be insurable, and where we will see an escalation of prices and a serious conflict in terms of the kind of health care system that Albertans expect and want.

So, Mr. Speaker, if we can't have that full debate here, if people in Calgary don't know what's going on because their own members won't get up here and explain the situation, then they don't have any opportunity to be informed and they don't have any opportunity to participate in the debate. If we have a longer session, if we do not have an adjournment motion on the floor of this Legislature ready for them to walk out anytime they want, they have a better chance of getting a full view of what's going on in that bill and having their own opportunity to participate and an opportunity to get organized, if that's what they want to do.

I'll tell you that those 70 to 100 women that we met with this morning when Nancy and I were in Calgary will certainly tell you that they are not very happy with the way things are going.

MR. BONNER: Nancy? Who's Nancy?

MS CARLSON: Sorry. The Member for Edmonton-McClung, our leader, Mr. Speaker, and a very fine job she did there this morning answering a number of questions on health care. Why was she there? Because these members were not there. There was no one there speaking on their behalf.

MR. SAPERS: That was outside the House.

MS CARLSON: Sorry. Yes. Outside the House. Apparently they were here getting ready to debate this motion this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. So we are expecting some of them to get up and defend the reason why on the second day of debate this motion has to be passed so that they can close down this session of the 24th Legislature without a full debate on all of the issues that are before us here.

We haven't even started to talk about education, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I tabled 77 letters from parents and members of the parent advisory council at Meyokumin school in Edmonton-Ellerslie. That's an elementary school that serves a wide constituency of people. Many of the students who attend that school are low-income children. Many of the children who attend that school are special-needs children. With the funding cuts that we've seen, there has been a huge stress on that school in recent years to provide the kind of education that those kids deserve, not that they want but that they deserve. In fact you can't do it. Those parents are so upset at the way funding is happening that nearly half of those parents sent us letters, and I think that is a large number of people to express an opinion from one particular region.

They know that they can't raise the kind of funding that they require in that school in order to provide the services that their kids need. In fact they can't even raise the additional funding that's required to match the same kind of funding that is in other schools in this city because they don't have the kind of income coming in from the community to provide those needs. They do all the things the minister has told us to do. They work bingo. They work casinos. They sell chocolates. They sell gift wrap. They do everything under the sun they can to raise money so that those special-needs kids in that school and the low-income kids have some of the services they need. They don't have a hot lunch program, Mr. Speaker, which they need there, they don't have aides in the classroom, which they need, and they don't have as many special-needs teachers as they need in that school, because there just isn't enough funding.

That's the kind of debate that we need to have in this Legislature. That's the kind of debate that they are expecting to happen when they table 77 letters in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, but we know, given the kinds of time constraints that we are under here, that that debate is never going to happen, that we are never going to see the Minister of Education stand in this fall session and fully tell us, fully explain to those parents why it is that they do not have enough funding to provide the basic level of education for their students. I'm not talking about field trips. I'm not talking about special computers in their school. We're talking about basic textbooks. We're talking about children in classrooms not having to share textbooks. We're talking about children in classrooms that are in numbers that are manageable. I have been in those classrooms, and you cannot manage classrooms that have more than 30 students in them. There is absolutely no ability to spend unique and special time with those kids and give them the kind of attention they want.

5:10

That reminds me of another point that a constituent was discussing in my office just last Friday. She was very upset. She has a son in high school this year, Mr. Speaker. This is her first child to go to high school, so it's a new experience for her. She was completely unprepared for the large size of the classrooms and the number of students that each teacher is expected to manage. She hoped that this would be debated in this legislative sitting. I told her that we're only going to be here for a couple of weeks. When the government decides that we don't go in until the middle of November, when we see these motions come on the Order Paper as fast as we do, there is no hope that this issue is going to be debated. So I raise it now, Mr. Speaker, hoping that the Minister of Education is going to address this issue.

She said to me that she went to parent/teacher interviews recently to talk to the teachers about her son's performance. He is pulling in solid marks, not outstanding but solid marks, but she wanted to speak to every teacher. First of all, she said that because there are so many students per teacher, they were only allowed 10-minute sessions per student. She said that wasn't nearly enough to fully develop the discussion that she needed to have with some of them, and much to her dismay she found that one of his teachers didn't even know what his name was, Mr. Speaker.

School started the beginning of September, and she went for the parent/teacher interview in the early part of November, so now we're talking September, October, 10 days into November, and the teacher did not know her son's name. When the teacher was asked about that, when she mistook his name several times for somebody else's, she said: "Well, you know, I can't help it. I'm really sorry. I'm supervising 250 grade 10 students". That doesn't talk about the grade 11 students and the grade 12 students. She said 250 students. "I only see them this many hours a week; how am I supposed to know everybody's name?" Well, Mr. Speaker, what does that say about our education system? How can it be that we are so underfunded that teachers have such high workloads, that they have so little preparation time, that they don't even get to know their students' names. Mr. Speaker, I think that's appalling.

She asked if I would raise that as a question in this Legislature when we came back into session this week, and I had to tell her no, Mr. Speaker, that because of all of the other critical, pressing issues we have in this Legislature, there won't be time to address that issue. She said: what can be more important than the education of our children? I said: well, perhaps the health care of our children is equally as important. Perhaps the money that has been spent by this government improperly over the years on things other than basic services, things like Bovar, West Edmonton Mall loans, all of those kinds of things that we've seen happen over the years are issues that need to be addressed first. If we have time, if we're in session long enough, we will be able to discuss those kinds of constituency-based issues that are very, very important to people, certainly very important to this mother and I'm sure very important to all parents who experience for the first time the increasing workload of the teachers and the stress the teachers are under.

We're not going to have time to talk about that in this session because we're not going to be here long enough. Two weeks, three weeks, max. When we see an adjournment motion come in like this, we know that the end is already in sight and, Mr. Speaker, I find that appalling, because our job here is to represent everybody in this province every time they want us to, to the fullest extent that they need representation.

MR. TRYNCHY: Save it for the spring session.

MS CARLSON: Save it for the spring session, we're told. Well, some of these issues cannot be saved to the spring session. We are talking about the education of our children. We are talking about needed and necessary health care services. We are talking about the introduction of a two-tiered health care system with private health care in this province. If we save that debate for the spring session, there will be no debate because it will have occurred, Mr. Speaker, and there is no second chance once this government opens the doors to two-tiered health care.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's right. And how do you get it back?

MS CARLSON: Well, we don't get it back. That's in fact true. We never get it back.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am adamantly opposed to this motion. I find it reprehensible to see it on the Order Paper this early in the fall session, and I will be strongly voting against it.

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

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have listened very carefully to the two speakers from the Liberal side discussing the motion that we have in front of us. After hearing their speeches, I couldn't help but think that they must be looking at some other motion, because the motion that I'm reading, if I'm correct, is:

Be it resolved when the Assembly adjourns to recess the fall sitting of the Second Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

For the sake of the people at home who are not here today to understand the context of our debate, I just read the motion into the record. Nowhere in this motion does it talk about cutting short the time that we're in the Legislature. Nowhere does it mention that we are going to shorten the debate at all.

There are several facts that we have to put on the table. Number one is that we are in the fall session. Number two is that we have to adjourn someday.

MRS. SOETAERT: What?

MR. PHAM: We have to adjourn the session someday. We have to, Mr. Speaker. We cannot be here forever. So this motion is very clearly designed for a date that when we adjourn, we apply. What is wrong with that? What is wrong with a little bit of forward thinking?

We do a lot more forward thinking than just setting a motion like this in place. We have a three-year business plan. We are thinking three years ahead, not only of today but three years down the road. This motion is an example of us who are trying to be forward thinking. The Liberals just want to think of one day at a time, but we as a government cannot afford to think like that. If we think like that, then we can never be in power.

Mr. Speaker, I also have heard a lot of the comments from my other Liberal colleagues saying that they need to be in the House in order to get this government working and address the concerns that they have. One of them talked about a teacher who, after three months in the classroom, cannot recognize her own students and blames that on this government. I said if I had a teacher who cannot recognize a student in her classroom after three months, there is something wrong with that teacher. I insist that if I have my kid in a classroom for three months, his or her teacher had better recognize him or her.

I have to tell my colleagues on the opposition side that the government and the province doesn't stop working just because we are not in the Legislature. We can still get a lot of work done outside the Legislature. When we are in the Legislature, I have always said that I have never seen so many talented people wasting so much time doing so little, just because everybody feels they have to stand up and make a point. Last night when Bill 37 was in front of the House, I could see that the momentum and the spirit had changed totally. I looked at the opposition side. Everybody was trying to jump up and down, making a point, and you know they were very, very active fear mongering people. I could tell you that if every night when the public was not here they could have acted in the same way, we would have much better debates in the Legislature.

The point that the opposition member was trying to get across is very, very simple: they need to be in the Legislature in order to be seen as working. I am quite sympathetic with that, because it's very difficult for them to prove that they are working or they are even existing. Is it our fault that we have to be here in order for them to justify their existence to their constituents? People talk about the idea of serving the public. I think that every one of us should always remember we are here for a reason: we are here to serve our constituents. We don't have to be in the Legislature to do that. We can be effective wherever we are. We have a lot of issues that we can work on: health care, education, government budgets. All those issues you can address when you are not even in the House. I hope that you do not stop working when you're no longer in here, when the time runs out.

MRS. SOETAERT: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order

Offending the Practices of the Assembly

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes. It's 23(1): "introduces any matter in

debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." I think he's insulted the proceedings of the Assembly, saying that we don't have to be in here to serve our constituents. I said in my talk: yes, we serve our constituents out there, but democracy demands that we come in here. He's implied that we don't need to be in here to serve democracy.

MR. PHAM: On this point of order, I feel ashamed for her to stand up and make such a ridiculous point. Yes, we have to serve our constituents. We have to serve our constituents every day of the year. We don't have to serve our constituents only in the Legislature, and if you haven't learned that by now, that is the point that you should learn.

MR. SAPERS: You're way too far, Hung. Just withdraw.

MR. PHAM: And talking about withdrawing, that gentleman speaking from his chair should be ashamed of himself.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Although there is no point of order, I think there is a threat of it there. If we could somehow get on the motion of both sides on this issue, we would be better off.

In conclusion, the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last point I want to make is that I want to re-emphasize the point that we are here in the fall session. We have to adjourn someday. That is a fact. Nobody can argue that fact. This motion is there to serve the purpose on the day that we all agree to adjourn the House. Then that motion will be applied. It's very simple.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]