

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 18, 1998**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/11/18

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Let us pray.

Our Father, keep us mindful of the special and unique opportunity we have to work for our constituents and our province, and in that work give us strength and wisdom.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 143 Albertans urging this government not to pass Bill 37, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 1998.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Bill 48 Election Amendment Act, 1998

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 48, being the Election Amendment Act, 1998.

Mr. Speaker, may I take this opportunity to thank the Member for Calgary-Cross and the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan as well as the staff from the Department of Justice for their assistance.

This amendment prohibits all but certain convicted inmates from voting in provincial elections. The aims of the amendment are to promote order and respect for the law and to promote participation in the democratic process.

[Leave granted; Bill 48 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 48 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have a very long list today of notices that have been presented to me. We'll begin first of all with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I table five copies of the 1998 annual report of the Calgary Stampede. This document reflects the great success of the Stampede over the last year, supported by about 2,000 volunteers. As government-appointed director I note that not only are Calgaryans proud of this organization, but I believe all Albertans are as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of the Alberta Law Foundation annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1998.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I want to table copies of the names of 500 teachers and principals from across Alberta that the Alberta Liberal caucus has received. These are teachers and principals who are opposed to Bill 219.

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table two documents. The first is five copies of the annual report for the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. This report highlights some of the outstanding research that is done in Alberta because of the commitment of the foundation and this government to research.

I'm also pleased to table for the benefit of some of the members opposite, Mr. Speaker, following our discussion yesterday on 78s and new technology, five hard copies of the ICT strategy report, which I consider to be the eight-track tapes of modern communication.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, as minister responsible for seniors and AADAC and on behalf of the chair of AADAC, the Member for Calgary-Currie, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly as part of National Addictions Awareness Week strategy a news release and information package for seniors from the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission entitled All the Best: Challenges and Choices for the Older Adult.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table four copies of documents describing the major premiums, fees, and licences that are collected by government ministries. We discussed this as late as last night in the Legislature, and I gave a commitment to opposite members that we would be doing this. The tabling includes reports from all ministries except for Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs and science, research and information technology. Those two ministries do not have any revenues for premiums, fees, and licences. Maybe they should. I'm also tabling a letter to my opposition critic in light of what has been tabled here for information for him. These fees will all be reviewed and looked at in light of the Supreme Court decision related to probate fees, which may in turn have some effect on us. I'm tabling them today, and any revisions hopefully will be announced in budget '99.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. A few tablings for the Assembly this afternoon. The first is my August 14, 1998, letter to the Treasurer asking for details of the CIBC Wood Gundy review of the Alberta Treasury Branch.

The second is five copies of my October 26 second letter to the Treasurer asking for details of the CIBC Wood Gundy study of the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch.

The third is the November 5, 1998, response from the Provincial Treasurer denying the release of the information on the CIBC Wood Gundy terms of reference.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a fax to Alberta building inspections departments advising them that effective January 13, 1997, Skyline Industries of Calgary is no longer participating in the Warnock

Hersey certification program for northern pine shakes inspections.
Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud this afternoon to be able to table the requisite number of copies of correspondence signed by 237 Albertans who write powerful and persuasive messages not to proceed with Bill 37.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There is another tabling that I might as well get out of the way now. This is five copies of responses received to freedom of information and privacy requests requesting information from Alberta Treasury on the future plans for the Alberta Treasury Branch. A review of the documents released will reveal that they've been heavily censored. In fact most of the pages are entirely blank.

THE SPEAKER: Mr. Clerk, before we proceed to Introduction of Guests, I think I may have missed a hand. Did it come under Reading and Receiving Petitions or Presenting Petitions? [interjection]

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

THE SPEAKER: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll ask that the petition I tabled in this House on Monday now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure and honour this afternoon to introduce very special visitors to this Assembly to you and through you to all members present, former MLA Bryce Stringham. Bryce served as an MLA for Bow Valley-Empress from 1955 to 1959 and sat as an Independent. Mr. Stringham's father, George Lewis Stringham, also served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the United Farmers of Alberta from 1921 to 1935. This family has left quite a legacy with this Assembly. Mr. Stringham as well is accompanied by his wife, Mary, seated with him today, and I understand this is his first visit to the Legislature in 35 years. Mr. and Mrs. Stringham are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and at this time I'd ask them both to rise and if all members would join me in a warm welcome to the Assembly. Welcome back.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

1:40

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of pleasure today that I introduce to you and members of the Assembly some of the council from the county of Vulcan, No. 2, the second oldest council in the province. Today we have the

administrator, Mr. Robert Strauss, Reeve Wayne Davey, and councillors Ian Donovan, Grant Lahd, Daryl McDonald, and Russel Smith. A special welcome to the new councillor, Doug McIntyre. Would they please rise along with spouse Mrs. Ruth Smith and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a distinct pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a fellow registered nurse and friend, Kathleen Connors. Kathleen is the president of the National Federation of Nurses' Unions and the chair of the Canadian Health Coalition. She has led and inspired thousands of registered nurses and citizens across Canada and around the world for her principled stands and knowledge about the Canadian health care system and the profession of registered nurses. I would ask Kathleen to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me today to be able to introduce to you and through you two guests seated in the members' gallery. The first is a lady that's just recently been elected to the municipal district of Rocky View, Bonnie Klettke. I look forward to working with her over her term and my term as elected officials representing the same people. Accompanying her is my assistant, Loretta Fontana. I would ask that they both rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two grade 6 classes from James Mowat school in Fort Saskatchewan. They're accompanied by Mrs. Bittner, Miss Dorosh, and Ms McCaflin. If they'd rise and please be welcomed by the Assembly.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a class of 34 students and two teachers, Mrs. Reva Martin and Miss Elissa Woolnough, from Brander Gardens elementary school in the fair riding of Edmonton-Whitemud. I'd like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you three exchange students who are seated in the members' gallery. They are Lenka Zakova from the Czech Republic and Rhea Peters from northern Germany. They are with the American Scandinavian Student Exchange. Ingeborg Peraza from Mexico is with Rotary International. All three are attending R.F. Staples high school in Westlock, the constituency you represent, Mr. Speaker. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Shawn Carson and his class from St. Anne Catholic elementary school. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly six students and their instructor, Mrs. Rosemary Waterman, from the Edmonton Academy. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House.

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

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the members of the Assembly grade 6 students from Rundle College Academy in Calgary. They are accompanied by their teacher, Pat Edelstein, and a volunteer parent, Vickie Terner, and they are seated in the public gallery. I request that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the pleasure today of introducing to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very keen observers of the changes in Alberta's health care system. One, in fact, is a health care professional who is unfortunately having to access health care these days. I would ask that Dee Warrington, best know to most of us as Mama Dee, and her companion Noelia, please rise and receive the welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: I'd like to introduce to the Assembly this afternoon a very extraordinary group of individuals who are seated in the Speaker's gallery. On August 21, 1998, the Westlock Foodgrains Bank brought together some 400 volunteers and 64 combines to harvest a quarter section of donated land, donated seed, and donated fertilizer in 15 minutes and 43 seconds, creating a Guinness world record. This extraordinary volunteer achievement will yield over a quarter million dollars that will be donated to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank for an international water improvement project in Ethiopia. This is the third attempt over three years.

It was a spectacle extraordinaire. I had the privilege of riding in one of those combines. It's a form of volunteerism. This is a group of individuals who never once came to government to ask, "Would you do something for us? Would you help us?" They did it unto themselves, and they did it with a great deal of bringing together of people on this.

I would like to welcome the members of the Westlock Foodgrains Bank who are with us today: Les Dunford, Bernard Wiese, George McMillan, Albert Miller, Bill Siegle, and Walter Miller. Accompanying them this afternoon are Audrey Wiese, Ivy McMillan, Florence Miller, Janet Siegle, and Gladys Miller. Two individuals also associated with them, Leo Seguin and Dave Felstead could not be here today. I would ask them all to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to let the government in on a little secret. The reason they're having so much trouble on this private health care thing and the reason they're losing the debate is because Albertan's don't trust them. My first question, then, is to the Minister of Health. Doesn't the government's private health care policy just follow the Premier's earlier suggestion about a Mayo Clinic North and the selling of Alberta's health services to the highest bidder?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's health care policy, as repeatedly stated in the last sessions of this Legislature and stated again this session, is one of having the best public health care system possible in this province and, secondly, our adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act and the whole framework that establishes for Albertans and for Canadians.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, if that's true, Mr. Speaker, then why is this government leading the charge to dismantle the enforcement provisions of the Canada Health Act?

MR. JONSON: As indicated I think at least twice by myself in the debate that has taken place on the legislation before the House, we will be the only province with comprehensive legislation dealing with being able to control and protect the public health care system, Mr. Speaker, and therefore her premise I don't think is applicable.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that this government is already forcing Albertans to pay over 31 percent of health care dollars on private health, up from 23 percent in 1993, my question is: what is the final target? Is it 50 percent? Is it 70 percent?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, this government has significantly reinvested in health care in this province as a result of being able to bring our financial books in order and being able to target health care with respect to reinvestment dollars. I think the major sort of gap that there is now in the funding with respect to Alberta's health care system and that of all other provinces is that the federal government has not seen fit, now that they are running a surplus, to restore significant amounts of money to the funding of this province.

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

Mental Health Services

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's own Mental Health Patient Advocate described in his last report how mental health patients in this province go without medication, go without the treatment they need because of a lack of appropriate services. Now, my question this afternoon is to the Minister of Health, and it's simply this: how can this minister's Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board run a budget surplus of \$3 million while all of those Albertans requiring mental health services can't find a bed, can't see a psychiatrist, can't access the services they need, Mr. Minister? How do you reconcile those two things?

MR. JONSON: First of all, I recognize that there is work to do in the whole field of mental health, and we have been giving priority to mental health, at least I certainly have as minister. We have increased funding in mental health. We've put a particular

emphasis on additional dollars for community mental health in this province. We have programs such as telepsychiatry operating in this province. I think it's the only province that has that type of service. But, yes, Mr. Speaker, we have more to do here.

Now, with respect to a budget which as I recall is in the neighborhood of 150 millions of dollars for the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board, they are running a \$3 million surplus. I suppose the member across the way would feel a lot better if they were running a \$10 million deficit, but that is the Liberal way. I commend the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board for being fiscally responsible and spending their money wisely.

MR. DICKSON: The Liberal way is providing services to people who need them when they need them.

My follow-up question to the minister is: given what this minister has told us, why is it that constituents of mine who need a psychiatric bed have to wait 10 months to see a psychiatrist, have to fight with people in the hospital to be able to be kept overnight? Why is that, Mr. Minister, if this reinvestment is happening?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member across the way has individual cases that he wants to be investigated and reviewed – my figures don't quite jibe with what he is contending.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I think I would call upon the members across the way, the members of our own caucus, and all people of the province to put a greater degree of emphasis on mental health in this province. This is something that I am certainly trying to do. Mental health was not reduced in terms of expenditure at the beginning of our last three or four years of business plans. It has been increased significantly lately. We do have additional work to do; I acknowledge that. There are a number of issues to be addressed. One of the very significant ones, I think, is the shortage that we have of psychiatrists in this province and I think nationally.

MR. DICKSON: Well, my final question to the minister is this: how does he account for the shortage of psychiatrists and the shortage of beds when over the last three years the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board has run a cumulative surplus of \$20 million?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered the question about the surplus. The other thing – and this is, I think, a matter that involves negotiations. With respect to some of the transfers and reorganization of the whole area of mental health to a more community-based focus, there does have to be some money available to provide for that transfer. This is the subject of discussion and negotiations with many parties, and I'm not going to comment further until those negotiations proceed.

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

Treasury Branches

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I tabled copies of heavily censored reports and memoranda that were prepared by Alberta Treasury regarding the future of the Alberta Treasury Branch. My questions are to the Treasurer. Why all the secrecy, Mr. Treasurer? What information has been hidden away from Albertans in the document entitled Alberta Treasury Branches: Alternative Business Outcomes?

MR. DAY: There are no secrets, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, maybe the Treasurer will tell Albertans what information is being kept secret from them in the December 16, 1997, memo from the Deputy Treasurer to the CEO of Alberta Treasury Branch entitled ATB Options?

MR. DAY: There are no secrets, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I have left an invitation – and it's still open – to the critic opposite to sit down with the CEO. You know, on any given day he'll stand up and yank a letter out of a file somewhere, which is certainly his right to do, but without letting me see it first or respond to it, it puts me in somewhat of a difficult situation to respond to a specific. The invitation is still open to him or to his colleagues to sit down with the CEO. This apparently is a letter to the CEO, as I understand it. He should do that. I understand that the CEO did recently at my request set up an appointment with him, which he canceled. But the invitation is still open for him to do that.

MR. SAPERS: Given that these are the Treasurer's own documents, prepared for him by his own staff and refused by his staff under a freedom of information request, I would like the Treasurer to tell us in this Assembly why, if he has nothing to hide from the taxpayers of Alberta regarding his plans for the Alberta Treasury Branch, he just doesn't end the censorship, end the secrecy, and release the information?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I will say that though I don't often congratulate the media, I will congratulate them for their consistent reporting on the Alberta position related to ATB. There are a variety of options that were asked to be considered, and those are still out there and being discussed. That has been the consistent position of this government: the well-being of ATB and the well-being of the customers.

In terms of a secret, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that the Liberals have a secret. They are not really telling us their position related to ATB. In May of 1997 it's well published that the Liberal leader said: sell it; don't consult; don't even talk to Albertans; flog it; sell it; get rid of it. Now, that was in May of '97. Then on September 5, '98, the Liberal Treasury critic said: a public share offering might be the appropriate way to go. So now they jerk to that particular move, and as recently as yesterday they were saying that it should be the status quo. So they've moved from: sell it; don't talk to anybody; just flog it; get rid of it. Then they said: well, it's an IPO; that's the Liberal position. Then they said: it's status quo. I would suggest that they have the secret.

I'm tabling faithfully reported media documents which record that the government position has always been consistent, that the Liberals are very inconsistent.

MR. SAPERS: Point of order.

MR. DAY: If they want Albertans to trust them – and there was a vote of trust, a vote of confidence in March of '97, and the score was about 63 to 17. It was more than 17 at one point, but they keep coming over to our side, and that's kind of the way it goes.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to table these documents and suggest to the Liberals that if they want trust from Albertans, they have to be consistent. They can't first jerk to the left and then jerk to the left again and then jerk to the left again. They've got to be consistent.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the NDP opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

2:00 Health Care System

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today the Alberta Premier became the recipient of the 1998 Canadian health care demolition award provided by the Canadian Health Coalition. It's really appropriate. It goes: "5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Boom." I'll file copies with the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, when the government said in its budget earlier this year that the health care cuts are over, maybe they didn't take into account the fact that the regional health authorities, more than half, still have deficits. In fact, less than two weeks ago the General hospital in Edmonton terminated seven positions, including its one and only groundskeeper, because it has a deficit. Meanwhile, they're moving in more people, the STD clinic and the Capital health authority. My question to the health care minister is: why won't this government provide the money that is necessary to eliminate those deficits so that proper public health care services can be provided? Or does he want the nurses to be shoveling the snow next?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. leader or inform her if she wasn't aware before that we did undertake an overall review of the funding needs and funding formula for regional health authorities. That report has been publicly released and discussed and supported by government at least in terms of its first stage. I think in a very rapid and responsible manner the government did respond with some \$61 million of additional funding for regional health authorities, which will provide the basis for regional health authorities to work towards a balanced budget. For instance, in the Capital health authority, which I would hope the hon. leader is concerned about, they are working towards that balanced budget.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, will the Health minister do the responsible thing, demonstrate his government's commitment to public health care, and at least signal to those hospitals that are being forced to lay people off that he is committed by withdrawing Bill 37?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the leader refers to a specific management decision in the Capital health authority, but she neglects to also refer to the fact that the Capital health authority is adding a significant number of beds, including ICU beds at the Grey Nuns hospital, hiring additional nurses, hiring additional medical personnel and support personnel, which I'm sure add to a significantly larger number than the number that she's referring to as having been either reassigned or discharged.

MS BARRETT: Well, on the subject of Calgary, then, why would this government authorize through its appointed members to the regional health authorities the privatization of two hospitals in Calgary, blow up the remaining publicly owned one, and realize they've gone too far, and now consider building a new hospital in Calgary. Mr. Speaker, I have the brick from the Calgary General. The people in Calgary say that it's crazy.

DR. TAYLOR: Pam, it's not the brick that's crazy.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister responsible for science, research, and information technology, I don't know what the meaning of that little shot across the bow was, but it's really not in keeping with the decorum of the House.

The hon. Minister of Health.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, in the reorganization of health care services in Calgary the matter of the closure of the Bow Valley hospital has been discussed at great length. It was a management decision of the regional health authority in terms of consolidating and making more efficient their overall acute care service in Calgary. They have expanded their capacity in terms of long-term care and continuing care. I agree that with the population growth there they need to move further in that particular direction. Yes, I acknowledge that the Bow Valley hospital is now demolished, but there is significant acute care capacity and, as I said, a rapid expansion of long-term care capacity in Calgary.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the comment about a new hospital in Calgary is something that I think on a long-term basis has to be planned for if the economy of this province remains strong, as we certainly plan it to be, and the population of Calgary particularly continues to grow. It's only realistic, looking down the road, to set some plans in place, particularly with respect to possible land acquisition.

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

Mechanics' Income Tax

MR. CAO: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's economy has been doing very well, and this is thanks to the low tax regime and the industrial workforce. Reflecting questions from my constituents, I would like to ask a question to our Provincial Treasurer. Specifically, an auto mechanic representing his colleagues was told to come to my office by the Canada taxation office. He told me that he and his colleagues were employed by auto mechanic shops. Part of the employment arrangement is that he is paid a very low basic wage, and the rest he has to earn through commissions. Also as a condition of employment they have to purchase their own tools, which are very, very expensive for an entry-level mechanic. My question is to the Treasurer. How come such Alberta workers cannot declare the cost of their professional tools as an expense on their income tax, be it federal or provincial, whereas companies and other professionals can?

MR. DAY: It's a good question, Mr. Speaker. Actually we've heard from mechanics before on that one, and it's not an area that we can alleviate within our provincial tax grid. We have asked the federal government to consider that. Maybe our friends across the way could talk to their cousins about that. I think it's a valid and appropriate request and alleviating that cost to mechanics should be looked at.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is also to the Treasurer. What can the provincial taxation do to address this seeming inequity in our Alberta working environment?

MR. DAY: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, that and other issues have been presented to the federal Finance minister. There's a number of requests that we've made to the federal government which we think would make life better for not just Albertans but for all Canadians. For some of those it seems to be taking time to get them addressed even though we're vigorously bringing them forward.

I guess one assurance the member could take back to that mechanic is that for the work that mechanic does here in Alberta, there's some small consolation in knowing he is taxed at a lower rate and taxed less here in Alberta than he would be if he were

working anywhere else in the country. Also, there's more work available to him here than anywhere else in the country. I know that's a small consolation, and until we can get the federal government onside on some of these issues, we'll hope that will help somewhat.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Pine Shake Roofing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The trouble in the Department of Labour has spread. The untreated pine shake and this government have something in common: the government that authorized and promoted this product now is the same as this untreated pine shake because both are rotting from the inside and they split right down the middle when they are nailed. My first question is to the minister responsible for the Alberta Research Council. Why did he tell this Assembly yesterday, "ARC does not have the ability to issue tags or to act as a certification organization," when we have this internal document from the Department of Labour which states, "The Standards Council of Canada . . . will be accrediting Alberta Research Council . . . as a third party certification agency" under the new industry standard for northern Alberta pine shakes?

2:10

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must compliment the member on his creative introduction to the question, because it's really quite humorous.

I will point out what I pointed out yesterday. The head of the department of forestry management at the Alberta Research Council was retained to serve as a member, only one member of 22, on the CSA technical committee. At the same time, he was one of 13 members on the subcommittee on northern pine shakes. I would just provide you with the names of those people on the committee. Just to give you a flavour of who is on those committees, we have industry representatives; for instance Mr. Klyne, from A1 Shakes. We have people from the Alberta forest service, we have people from Alberta Labour, we have people from Atlas forest products, and so on. So that's the nature of the CSA certification.

I will point out once again, Mr. Speaker, that ARC examined existing roofs, shakes that were already on the roofs, and they very clearly indicated that they did not provide any warranty as to their durability. Moreover, they noted that many of the roofs, in fact the majority, were installed with an excess of 7 percent off-grade allowance. When CSA sets standards, they set an allowance of 7 percent that can be off-grade, and the majority of the roofs examined by ARC were greater than 7 percent.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is also to the minister responsible for the Alberta Research Council. Is the minister aware that the original test roof panels installed at the Alberta Research Council were found to have significant rot?

DR. TAYLOR: Exactly what I said, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Research Council examined these shakes, provided their report on these shakes, but did not provide warranty and did note the installation imperfections.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the Minister of Labour. Why did he assure his colleague from St. Albert yesterday regarding pine shakes that this subject had "a great

deal of research done by the normal rigorous process," but the deputy minister states in this internal memo we have that "we have no research data to substantiate the support we have given to the . . . Pine Shakes" in the standata?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, it's always intriguing to come into the House and listen to internal documents obtained by the Liberals, where in fact the Liberal Party has full access to over 1,300 pages of released information, of good, rigorous research and data. They can walk over to the Department of Labour's library as any consumer can do and use it. He talks about the question of the regular process and how this went and the analogy of comparing it with the rot in the middle. I would only simply remind the hon. member that when this product was first approved, there was only one leader of this House that was in cabinet at that time, and it's not on this side of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Health Care Funding

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given some of the recent media coverage about the health system in Alberta, some of my constituents have raised concerns with me about funding for the regional health authorities and whether or not it is adequate, both locally and across the province. My question is to the Minister of Health. I'd like to know about the current state of funding for our health system and if this level of funding is adequate to meet the needs of Albertans.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to, first of all, say that in the general overall case we have put some \$230 million back into the funding of health care over the last short while, particularly in the area of regional health authorities' budgets. But one of the very important initiatives of government over the past number of months has been a very thorough consultation with regional health authorities and other entities in the health system across the province to look at that very basic question of, first of all, what the proper formula is by which to fund regional health authorities and then what the realistic amounts are to be injected into those budgets. That is the action that has been taken. I won't go on to repeat things I've said previously in this session, but we have already acted to a significant degree on that particular report with the recent funding announcement of \$61 million to provincewide services centred in Edmonton and Calgary, which benefit all Albertans - they're the highly specialized services - some \$30 million to the regional health authorities themselves, and also some money, \$2 million, for each of the academic health centres in the province.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: how does the government plan to ensure that this funding level remains adequate in the future given the well-known fact that our population is both increasing and aging?

MR. JONSON: I think there are two very important initiatives or directions of government, Mr. Speaker, in that regard. First of all, we hope to be able to implement the recommendations of the Bonnie Laing/Jacques report, as it's called, on overall funding for regional health authorities. But I think there are two other things that are very, very important and will likely be very important themes of our upcoming health summit. One is that we have to ask the question in this province and we have to set direction with

respect to getting measurable performance in the key areas of the health care system from any reinvestment. Secondly, we need to have a very broadly based and thorough look at what the sustainable level of funding is that we should have in the public health care system of this province of which we are so proud and so determined to maintain.

MR. BRODA: My final question, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: with the review committee recommendations, besides the immediate funding, what is your response to those recommendations?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think I have covered part of that particular question, but as I've indicated, with respect to the specific recommendations – and there are some 27 recommendations in the report. With respect to the full 27 recommendations these will be reviewed in the context of our overall business planning process in Health for the upcoming budget. As I've indicated, I think it would be fair to say that we've responded to four or five of the very key ones in the recent funding announcement and in some changes that we're looking at with respect to the overall application of the formula. But the overall report will be looked at in the context of our business plan and budget preparation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Social Policy

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Family and Social Services yesterday admitted that his policies are in contempt of the child welfare and social care facilities acts. He admitted to implementing a mandate change without first changing the legislation and, secondly, defended placing children in a facility designed for the homeless, addicted, and rehabilitated felons with the rationale that 16- and 17-year-old children are independent and therefore adults. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister explain why his government is in violation of the Age of Majority Act and the Child Welfare Act by abandoning 16- and 17-year-old youths to single men's hostels in this province?

2:20

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, this government does not believe nor accept the premise of the question. We don't feel we are in violation of any of the legislation, and I think the minister made that quite clear yesterday.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How, then, can a minister implement a change in the mandate of a committee without changing the act, once again placing the department in direct contempt of the law?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we don't feel that any change or any policies were implemented which are contrary to existing law. I don't believe that the minister yesterday at any time made the statement that he felt he was in contravention of the law.

MRS. SLOAN: Is this minister not doubling the risk of litigation for this government by ignoring the fact that his colleague yesterday admitted on those two parts to be in direct contradiction of the laws?

MR. HAVELOCK: No, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Legal Opinions

THE SPEAKER: That last series of exchange of questions from an hon. member to the Minister of Justice, who also is the Government House Leader, essentially sought legal opinions, which is a clear violation of the rules of question period. There was no intervention. Some responses were offered, but I think we should just be a little careful of getting into asking for legal interpretation and legal opinion. It does violate the rules that we do have in the House.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Education Funding

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I've heard that some school boards are collecting hundreds of dollars from parents in fund-raising and fees. In fact the members opposite have stated that parents in the Elk Island public school division are paying as much as \$483.89 per student. My question is to the Minister of Education. How can parents be asked to raise this much money to underwrite the cost of basic education?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to an Official Opposition news release dated October 9, 1998. It says:

The top five [fund] raisers on a per student basis were:

1. Elk Island Public \$483.90 . . .

I've looked at this as to what composed that \$483. It is a significant amount of money. I wish to point out the difference between fund-raising and school-generated funds. There is a significance difference. With respect to school-generated funds any funds which come under the direct control and responsibility of school management are reported under school-generated funds.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what the opposition has done is taken the numbers from cafeteria and store sales, noninstructional activities such as student council, grad funds, athletic trips; they looked at rentals, continuing education fees for adults, and transportation fees and mixed that all in with fund-raising and donations. So the \$483.00 referred to in their press release is not strictly donations and fund-raising. It includes a great number of other things.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: can the minister tell this Assembly how much of the \$483.00 per student was raised by parents through fund-raising?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we looked at the averages for the Elk Island public school district and roughly 6 percent of the money that was referred to in that was for fund-raising and donations. The balance came from the following sources: 43 percent was for the student council, the grad fund, athletics, and trips; less than one-half of one percent was for transportation fees; 23 percent came from cafeteria and store sales; and 13 percent came from instructional programs, such as field trips to the Legislature perhaps or wood and metal supplies for CTS programs.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, my last question once again is to the same minister: can the minister tell us whether any of this money was used to cover basic instructional costs such as textbooks and, if so, how much?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we've looked at this issue. When you combine textbooks and software purchases, it amounted to about one-half of one percent. Over 57 percent of Elk Island's expenses

covered noninstructional activities and supplies for the cafeteria and the school store; 26 percent covered learning resources for things like continuing education and transportation costs, which don't have anything to do, in the case of continuing education, with the K to 12 system; 13 percent of the cost was for instructional materials, such as I said, field trips, computer disks, and supplies and resources for the CTS program.

Special Waste Treatment Centre

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, extremely high PCB levels in snow samples taken close to the Swan Hills special waste treatment plant in March of this year show that a year and a half after the 1996 leak, PCBs were still escaping from the plant. Why is the Minister of Environmental Protection allowing this contamination to continue to happen?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, it is true that some of the snow samples taken after the explosion did show an above normal reading. We have been concerned about some fugitive emissions. There have been instructions issued to the operators of the plant to look after those fugitive emissions, and we are confident that the sampling from the voles and the snow will show that the emissions have been taken care of. Incidentally, the level was just slightly elevated.

MS CARLSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, what assurances can the minister give us that in fact we are not going to have a continuation of this contamination when year after year he has stood in this Assembly and said it isn't going to happen, and it keeps happening?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, there have been two events at the Special Waste Management Corp.'s facility at Swan Hills, two explosions that did in fact cause the release of some PCBs and dioxins and furans. That's true, but the fugitive emissions that we were concerned about were from things like the outside storage, which has been taken care of, from things like the unloading facilities at the plant. Those have been taken care of, and we're confident that in fact we will see an elimination of the PCBs around the plant. As a matter of fact, the testing that has been done on the wildlife in the last while is showing that there isn't an elevated reading anymore.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, that isn't comprehensive enough. Will this minister commit to provide adequate funding for the study of PCBs, dioxins, and furans in predatory animals in the region so that we know just how serious this contamination is higher up the food chain? Not a spot analysis but long-term, necessary funding. I wouldn't eat those fish in that area if my life depended on it.

2:30

MR. LUND: I was anticipating the second question, but it was just a statement after the question, I guess.

Mr. Speaker, currently the operators are collecting samples of wildlife. Any hunter or trapper can take wildlife samples to the operator. They will have them examined for levels of PCBs, dioxins, and furans, and the monitoring and testing of the voles is continuing. That's been ongoing all along. So we're confident that there is adequate testing going on to make sure that there isn't a continuation of the escape of PCBs and/or dioxins and furans.

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

Highway 13

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. For some time now there has been concern about the condition of highway 13 east from Camrose to Daysland. I understand a recent engineering geometric assessment of highway 13 indicated widening from Camrose to Daysland is warranted and will complete the continuity of highway 13. This fall a rut fill was completed on this section of highway 13. Many of my constituents, especially those with small cars, have expressed concern about the safety of this rut-filled road in light of the approaching winter and icy season. Can the minister give my constituents an update on this repair project and allay their concerns about safety, especially for small car operators?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly share the concerns of the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. We recognize the importance of highway 13, and with that recognition, the west end last year was rebuilt, curbs were taken out, and the roads widened. That was the start of really dealing with the issues of highway 13. The section east of Camrose to Daysland developed some tire track depressions that ultimately we had to deal with late in the season. We filled those tire track depressions, and hopefully we'll be able to get through the winter. We will be monitoring it very closely so that indeed there are no safety risks. If indeed it does become a safety risk, we will look at signage; we will look at ways of dealing with the issues during the winter. Hopefully in spring we'll have another assessment of that road, and indeed if there is further work that will be required, we'll be prepared to do that come spring.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you for that update. My second and final question: will the minister tell us when we can expect that the proper job of widening this part of highway 13 will occur?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: There is a recognition that the road is narrow, and certainly it is the intention of the department to widen the road. It's in the plans, and at the present time it would appear that hopefully, if our budgets permit, by the year 2003 that road will be widened.

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

School Construction

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Why do the residents of Calgary's Hidden Valley get a brand-new school without even asking while parents in Edmonton's Twin Brooks work for five years for a new school, bus their children to 32 different locations, and are still put on a waiting list?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I wish to make it very clear that when we make decisions about building schools, it's done by our School Buildings Board. Our School Buildings Board is made up of an arm's-length group of professionals who look at issues with respect to the needs of schools.

The simple answer to the question posed by the hon. member - it's a good one - is that the utilization rate of schools in the Calgary Catholic system is currently at about 104 percent. The utilization rate for schools in the Edmonton public system is roughly 80 percent. So it is very difficult to rationalize a decision to build a new school where existing schools are not being used.

DR. MASSEY: So why, then, was the Calgary separate board asked to give up existing school space when Calgary public has more empty space for that charter school?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issue of having existing schools used for charter schools or for other purposes – that offer was made to both the Catholic and the public boards in Calgary. I think it is important to note that these are large expenditure items, and we must be very cautious in looking at the dollars that we spend in school capital. But both the Catholic board and the public board had the same offer made to them. It was the Catholic board that first responded, predominantly because of their pressing need for space in north-central Calgary.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister assure the residents of Twin Brooks that politics played absolutely no role in the breaking of all the capital funding rules when the decision was made to give Hidden Valley a new school?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I can categorically say that there was no political interference with respect to this decision. With respect to the breaking of the rules, I want to make it very clear that there is a fund in our capital budget for emergent capital needs. There is a fund for that. This school request clearly came within the scope of an emergent need. Emergent needs have been met all over the province, not just in the city of Calgary. In areas where there's been high growth, we've been compelled to look at requests to our emergent need fund in order to deal with perhaps portables or new schools. I reject the notion and categorically deny that there was any political interference in this decision. No ifs, ands, or buts. No qualifications.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Housing Rent Increases

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I met with several seniors in my constituency who are on fixed incomes. They were notified that their rent for a one-bedroom apartment is being increased by \$2,400 per year, which is over 10 percent of their income. The rent supplement program is supposed to help Albertans most in need of affordable housing. I understand that there is a projected surplus of up to \$1 million in this program which cannot be accessed by these seniors. So my question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. What were the conditions that resulted in this huge surplus?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Cross has cited a real problem in the city of Calgary and in high-growth communities where low vacancy rates exist. The rent supplement program has been very effective, in fact topping up the dollars so that the 30 percent factor for seniors will help them subsist in various accommodations. Some of the landlords last year and this spring, in fact, in Calgary have chosen not to renew their agreements with Alberta Municipal Affairs, seeking the opportunity to engage other clients who can afford to pay more in those facilities.

Mr. Speaker, we intend to work, as a result of our housing symposium, in conjunction with the housing management bodies in Calgary who are maintaining an inventory. We intend to work with the city of Calgary in helping them find new and alternative ways to the rent supplement. We are continuing to find other

circumstances, such as the refinancing of housing in Calgary that netted about \$965,000 returned to the city of Calgary so that they can dispatch that in ways to assist those seniors and to assist people in their community in ways that they feel serves the greatest need.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister commit to making this surplus available to low-income seniors and other Calgarians who have seen their rents increase by up to 50 percent?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I want to suggest to you that our due diligence, our work that we're doing with the housing bodies will hopefully find new ways. Should there be additional dollars that we can provide through rent supplement this year, we will do that. But, Mr. Speaker, I think that more than that, there is a responsibility to work with the private and the public sectors, to work with those members of the foundation in Calgary that are seeking new and alternative routes so that seniors will not be subjected to the uncertainty of rising rates. Yet we will not and we are not prepared to engage in rent controls, to in fact give any kind of prohibitive measures to landlords in the marketplace.

2:40

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to be quite clear that I haven't asked for rent controls.

Given that I've also heard from my constituents that they are concerned that the proposed merger of the three Calgary housing management bodies will have a negative impact on tenants in social housing units, what will the minister do to protect these tenants, particularly given the shortage of affordable housing in Calgary?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, rather recently, when the consolidation was provided as an alternative for study over this next year by the city of Calgary, I engaged the chairman of B.C. Housing, a Mr. Jim O'Dea, to come. He has met with the city of Calgary and with all three of the management bodies in Calgary. He is exploring the existing circumstance we find ourselves in, topping up and paying off the deficits that relate to those management bodies, and he is also providing advice to our department, hopefully a report by this year's end about alternatives that we can do to first of all ensure that the seniors will have adequate and safe and affordable shelter and to ensure as well that this provincial government in its partnership with those municipalities and housing boards is putting its dollars in the place that can create the greatest positive effect.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Before we ask the Clerk to proceed to the calling of Recognitions, may I congratulate all members of the House and say thank you to all of you. The purpose of question period is to allow the maximum number of members to seek information. Today, 13 questions and series of exchanges; that's as high a number as we've ever had since I've had the opportunity of being in the chair.

We'll wait 30 seconds. The Clerk will proceed to calling Recognitions, and then we'll identify who goes.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: We'll proceed in the following order. First of all, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, to be followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, to be followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, then the hon. Member for

Calgary-Currie, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and we get to do a double-header today by calling on the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to come back a second time.

Agriculture Hall of Fame Inductees

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 15 of this year three Albertans were inducted into the Agriculture Hall of Fame. The hall of fame was created to recognize those who exemplify agricultural leadership through outstanding contributions to rural life, agriculture, and agriculture-related industries. Successful nominees that were honoured this year are Leonard Friesen of Airdrie, Lloyd Lee of Barrhead, and Jack Gorr of Three Hills, true pioneers dedicated to advancing the role of agriculture in the province of Alberta.

Leonard Friesen was honoured for service excellence in the Alberta cattle industry. Lloyd Lee was honoured for his influence on the livestock industry as a founding member and director of the Vega-Mellowdale Artificial Insemination Association, and from my own constituency, a friend and neighbour, Jack Gorr, a longtime farmer and agricultural economist, whose efforts have resulted in major reforms towards lowering the costs of grain transportation in Alberta.

Congratulations to all three award recipients on their outstanding achievements, that will continue to benefit Alberta's farming community for years to come.

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

Dr. David Schindler

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to congratulate Dr. David Schindler, Killam professor of ecology at the University of Alberta, on being the co-recipient of the Volvo environment prize for 1998. The Volvo prize is awarded for outstanding innovations or discoveries which are of regional or global significance in the environmental field. Dr. Schindler was selected for this important international prize for many new discoveries on the effects of pollution on fresh water ecosystems. They were associated with the excess of nutrients in water and with the effects of acid rain on lakes. Most importantly, as pointed out in the citation for the award, Dr. Schindler possesses a powerful and courageous capacity to inform the world about his work and to move to make decision-makers act. Recently he has turned his attentions to ice and snow, showing how chemicals have contaminated water flowing from the glaciers in the Rocky Mountains and how emissions from the Alberta Special Waste Treatment Centre have polluted snow close to the facility.

This is not the first time that Dr. Schindler has received prestigious international recognition. We should feel honoured to have a man of his stature working in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Canada Senior Games

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a great deal of pride and pleasure that I rise this afternoon to pay tribute to the many volunteers who were involved in Medicine Hat hosting the Canada Senior Games this summer. These games took place during the month of August, from August 19 to 22, led by Chairman Mr. Fred Kramer. Some 800 volunteers in Medicine Hat hosted 850 athletes from across Canada, seniors in various age limits over 55. The entire community of Medicine Hat became involved in this

project, and it was to a large extent the result of a tremendous amount of organization. In fact, I'm told two and a half years of preplanning went into this event.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all members of the Assembly to congratulate the many hardworking volunteers in Medicine Hat for hosting the most successful yet Canada Senior Games in August this summer.

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

Masako Miyazaki

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to congratulate Masako Miyazaki, the associate professor and director of the University of Alberta Telehealth Technology and Research Institute. This institute in conjunction with the telehealth network has been established on the campus at the U of A to conduct research and development so that information on the most up-to-date technology is available to faculties, students, and clinicians in Alberta.

The institute will collaborate with the U of A faculties and departments, such as computing science, engineering, and other health science faculties, to leverage existing research and development capabilities. Telehealth, Mr. Speaker, is a means of sharing information and providing health care services using interactive video, audio, and computer technologies. Research and development will be the core business for the new organization. The Telehealth Technology Research Institute Centre is going to be involved in technology that is constantly evolving to become more user-friendly and portable so that it can be integrated into the busy health care professional's day and ultimately into the client's daily activities.

Our congratulations, and we wish them the best of luck as they host the first international congress on telehealth and multimedia technologies in August of 1999.

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

HMCS Calgary

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take the opportunity to share with you the privilege of representing HMCS Tecumseh, which is the naval base located in my constituency.

Earlier this fall the Chamber of Commerce and myself were invited to tour on sail for two days on the *HMCS Calgary*, which is a frigate that's been commissioned by the Canadian navy and bears the name of our city of Calgary. In taking the Chamber of Commerce on this tour, the opportunity was made available to us to tour the naval base at Esquimalt and come to a better understanding of the role the Canadian navy plays in the defence of this country in a number of areas. The *HMCS Calgary* has, as you know, served us with distinction in the Gulf war, and while we were onboard, 30 sailors who are on active duty received their United Nations medals for service done in the former Yugoslavia. In addition to that, they were on training and manoeuvres following the retrofit of the ship and getting ready for further active service.

I would like to thank Captain Paul Maddison* and his crew and also Calgary Chamber of Commerce President Irene Pfeiffer for organizing the tour and for making us all aware of the work that our Canadian navy does on our behalf.

Thank you.

2:50 National Child Day

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, this Friday, November 20, is

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

National Child Day, which recognizes the adoption of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child as of 1989. The convention recognizes the basic human rights of children and youth, gives them additional rights to protect them from harm, and recognizes the important role of the family in bringing up children. In Canada the convention was ratified in 1991; however, Alberta remains the only province which has not endorsed it. The New Democrats first introduced, I'm pleased to say, a children's rights bill as long ago as 1983.

National Child Day is about telling the children in our lives that they are loved and respected exactly as they are. It's a day to commit to doing everything in our power to help our children reach their full potential. That's not a bad goal for us as legislators, Mr. Speaker, so I hope everybody agrees with me in saluting children.

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

June Lore

MR. MARZ: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This year June Lore of Carstairs joined a very distinguished group of Albertans when she was inducted into the Alberta order of excellence. June Lore's interest in education, history, and agriculture combined with her limitless energy have left an indelible mark on Alberta. She has been an area director and president of the Alberta Federation of Home and School Associations and president of the Canadian Home and School Parent-Teacher Federation. Under her leadership the federation conceived and organized its friendship for peace project, a project that encouraged teachers and students across Canada to learn more about developing nations and promoted an exchange of friendship, ideas, and experiences amongst classrooms around the world. Mrs. Lore is also a founding member of the Stockmen's Memorial Foundation, which is dedicated to honouring and remembering the builders of the livestock industry.

I'm sure that all the members of this Assembly will join me in congratulating Mrs. June Lore for receiving Alberta's highest honour, the order of excellence.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(1): "introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." I'm making specific reference to an answer offered by the Treasurer earlier in question period to my second supplemental question. That answer was just chock-full of untruths. I believe that that is very contrary to the practices and precedents of this Assembly.

I'll just begin simply by saying that if the Treasurer wants to become my appointments clerk, he's welcome to the job, and he can overlook my appointments calendar. To the best of my knowledge he hasn't done that yet, so he shouldn't make comments about what appointments I've kept and which appointments I've canceled, unless he knows for sure, particularly when he's just plain wrong.

Secondly, about the only thing that the Treasurer misrepresented more than the Alberta Liberals' position on the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches is the government's position on the future of the Alberta Treasury Branches. I will table for the Assembly, Mr. Speaker, very quickly, just three documents: one where the Premier says that the Treasury Branches aren't for sale, another one where

the Premier says that the first steps have been taken towards selling the Alberta Treasury Branches, and the third one where the Treasurer says that the Alberta Treasury Branches changes don't contain a hint of privatization, even though today he says that that's one of the options we're considering.

So I hope that the Treasurer will get his story straight in the future and not take up the time of this House trying to in some way mislead the Assembly, which I believe he attempted to do.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, a member may be called to order under 23(1), "introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." The rule is there, and it may very well be that everything that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has stated applies fully under the rule.

The difficulty the chair has is that when one hon. member says something in the House, the chair has to assume that it's absolutely 100 percent correct. Unless another hon. member challenges it, there's no way that the chair could stand up and say - well, the chair would not know if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora had attended an appointment or not unless the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora raised it. So the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora had every right to stand up under 23(1) to clarify a point, and I think the point's been made with respect to the clarification of the record on that.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: **Motions for Returns**

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 216 Citizens' Initiative Act

[Debate adjourned November 17: Dr. Taylor speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister of science, research, and information technology.

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I'm just wondering if I could be informed as to how much time I have left so I can judge my comments accordingly.

THE SPEAKER: Seven minutes.

DR. TAYLOR: Seven minutes? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, just to refresh you from where I was yesterday, I was pointing out the necessity of consulting Albertans on various issues and how our government had consulted Albertans on a number of issues and the importance of doing that. I was using as an example the computer disk and now the hard copy that I've tabled in this House as why governments need to consult Albertans

and pointing out that a referendum or a citizens' initiative is another way that people have of letting the government know what their issues are.

What this does as a citizens' initiative is bring government down to the people and up from the people to government. So it's not top-down government any longer. It gives the citizens an opportunity to bring issues up from the bottom. Issues that may concern the citizens or would obviously concern the citizens would then come from the citizens up to government. I think it's very important. Often we bring legislation down to the people, and as much as we consult with them, it is still government down to people.

Going from where I was yesterday, an example of good consultation that this government has done is with the ASRA report in terms of information technology. I was pointing out that we consulted Albertans on that, and it brought forward a number of recommendations from Albertans. One of those recommendations, just to give you a flavour of what those recommendations were from consulting Albertans, was the idea of investing in education, developing an ICT infrastructure. We need to do that. We need to grow the investment in R and D, and we also need to encourage the commercialization of R and D in Alberta. We know right now from consulting with Albertans that there are about 1,500 businesses and 40,000 people working in this industry. So that's an example of how government can consult Albertans, and that's an example of what we have done as a government in terms of consulting Albertans. As I've said, a citizens' initiative is another way of consulting Albertans. Mr. Speaker, I can see that you appreciate my bringing the relevance of this to the issue.

Just before I continue with my speech, Mr. Speaker, I was a little bit surprised and shocked yesterday – I went back and read *Hansard* – by some comments that were made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood. I would just read her comments yesterday on this issue. She was debating this bill. She says in her comments – and this is a direct quote from *Hansard*: “Can you explain to me how the public will become educated on all the issues?” She's suggesting that because there is more than one issue on a ballot, the public is in some way uninformed.

She goes on to say, Mr. Speaker, “Five issues on one ballot” – and I think that was about her emphasis – “Five issues on one ballot, going to the polls, are a lot for the public to know.” That's a bit of a tinge of arrogance. That is unbecoming of the Member for Edmonton-Norwood; in fact it's unbecoming of all the members. I would point out to you that if she suggests that five issues on one ballot are too much for the voters to know, then we have many elections – we have elections of MLAs where there are more than five candidates on one ballot. In fact, if we extended her logic to elections, we would have to assume that electors were confused, as she's suggested, in cases where there were five or more candidates running for an election for this Assembly.

3:00

MS LEIBOVICI: Is that how you got elected?

DR. TAYLOR: No. Actually in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, to answer the member opposite, there were four candidates running for election.

MS LEIBOVICI: They thought you were Nick.

DR. TAYLOR: No, they didn't think I was St. Nick.

I managed to get 65 percent of the popular vote, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad that the member opposite caused me to remind her of that fact.

Back to the point I'm making, Mr. Speaker. If we extend the member opposite's logic to elections, we would have to assume that electors are confused in cases where there are more than five candidates running. Now, if that is true, that would mean that 10 of the 17 members of her caucus were elected by what she calls confused voters.

If we consult even the report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Edmonton-McClung by-election, which was just held on Wednesday, June 17, which had six individuals running, that would mean that even the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of her party, was elected by confused voters. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm suggesting that because we had six names on the ballot in the election for her leader, those voters were confused. The Leader of the Opposition was elected, then, by confused voters. Now, that is something I might say, but I'm surprised that a member of her own party would suggest that her leader was elected by confused voters.

So I would encourage, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Norwood to rethink her comments and get up in this debate and withdraw the comments that she has made suggesting that voters can't understand or deal with five or more issues. I just wanted to point that out before I continue with some more descriptions of this fine bill, Bill 216, that is being brought forward by my colleague.

What Bill 216 does, Mr. Speaker, is build on the foundation of democracy. It builds on the people of . . . Well, I see my time has expired, but I have a number of further comments I'd like to make, so I'd ask for the unanimous consent of the House to continue.

THE SPEAKER: Does the House wish to provide unanimous consent to the hon. minister of science, research, and information technology? All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. minister of science, research, and information technology.

I'll just tell the House a little story. Once when I had the privilege of serving as the minister of the environment in the province of Alberta I stood in this Assembly one Wednesday afternoon with my estimates. For the estimates, of course, the speaking time provided at that time to the then minister was 30 minutes. So I stood in the House, going on from 3:30 to 4 o'clock, and I asked the House after my 30 minutes had expired whether or not I could have unanimous consent to continue. The House provided me with unanimous consent. I then proceeded to speak for the remaining hour and a half and thoroughly filibustered my estimates.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to enter into debate on Bill 216, the Citizens' Initiative Act, which has been sponsored by my hon. colleague the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Speaker, democracy has laid the foundation of our current political system. In the beginning democracy's intention was for each citizen to have a direct influence on all the workings of society. The essence of direct democracy would allow citizens to actively participate in every aspect of the political system. Since

those times democracy has evolved into the representative system we now have in place. Through the electoral system constituents elect people to represent their interests and to voice their opinion in our political institutions. These political representatives are held accountable for their decisions and actions by those who elected them. In the final analysis the real power remains in the hands of the people.

Grassroots democracy, Mr. Speaker, is not lost through the elected representatives. Rather, this system has allowed for the streamlining of the political process so that citizens may influence the system in a way that allows them to conduct their personal business on a day-to-day basis while at the same time knowing that their best interests are being represented at the various levels of government. Citizens do have a direct voice in what goes on in this province. Through their elected MLAs the people of Alberta are able to directly influence the process. Therefore, I believe that Bill 216, though it has the right intentions, would only serve to duplicate the effective process already in place.

There is another issue I would like to raise in relation to Bill 216. Mr. Speaker, though our current political system is designed to reflect the views of the majority, there is certainly recognition of the importance of maintaining an open forum for the views of all Albertans. As you know, for Albertans to influence the contents and course of legislation under Bill 216, what is required is the forwarding of a petition containing the signatures of 10 percent of the total number of ballots cast in the last provincial election, to have this 10 percent in two-thirds of the electoral divisions. In the last provincial election there were 948,338 ballots cast; therefore the petition would have to have 94,834 signatures and 10 percent in two-thirds of the electoral divisions. This is a large number, but the possibilities of fluctuation in the number of voters in an election could drastically change with the outcome of one of these petitions. If voter apathy caused a substantial decrease in the number of voters, there is a significant possibility that the ease of gaining the required number of signatures could allow the successful introduction of legislation which may not accurately reflect the views of the majority of Albertans. For example, if there was a 40 percent voter turnout in a provincial election, the 10 percent which would be required for an initiative would only end up being four signatures out of every hundred voters.

Mr. Speaker, the difficulty with Bill 216 lies not only in the fact that there is danger of introducing legislation that may cater to only a few. There is a very real problem that unlike the election of public officials, this bill would leave Albertans with little recourse to vote against the legislation. Of course, the possibility that the course of the legislation may be driven by special interests and possibly at the peril of the rest of Albertans is something that we should carefully consider in the debate around this bill. I would like to stress again that it is our duty as MLAs to consider the views of both the majority and the minority of this province when considering legislation.

3:10

Finally, I would like to suggest that Bill 216 could lend itself to emotional appeal as much as to rational argument. There is a risk that initiative elections would be open to emotion and misrepresentation by interested parties, possibly obscuring the true merit and disadvantage of the issue and misleading the electorate entirely. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to illustrate this. I just read this in the latest *Alberta Report*.

Prof. Jennings tells how a mischievous high school freshman in Idaho recently circulated a petition calling for a ban on a dangerous substance called "dihydrogen monoxide." It caused excessive

vomiting and sweating. In its gaseous state it can cause severe burns. It is a factor in many accidental deaths, contributes to soil erosion, decreases the effectiveness of automobile tires and has been detected in many cancerous tumours. Forty-seven of the 50 students and teachers . . . signed his petition. Only three presumably inquired what this stuff actually was – namely two elements of hydrogen and one of oxygen, otherwise known as water.

But 47 out of 50 people signed the petition because of this dangerous gas.

When people feel strongly about this issue, Mr. Speaker, they would have no trouble pushing for an initiative petition. A fierce passion for an issue can definitely create an impetus for making use of an initiative petition. However, getting the okay from only 10 percent who voted in the last election does not necessarily indicate support for the province as a whole. As I mentioned earlier, this could be as low as four out of every hundred voters.

Mr. Speaker, let me stress that direct participation in the political process is vital to our current system of democracy. However, the system that is already in place allows for both the electorate's participation and accountability of elected representatives. What we should be concentrating on is getting more Albertans to participate in the process we already have. It is not unreasonable to assume that those who push for an initiative petition are likely also those who are already actively participating in our current process. Our focus should be getting more Albertans actively involved in the elections and the nominations rather than creating yet one more outlet for the few who already make use of this system. For the reasons I've stated, I cannot support Bill 216, the Citizens' Initiative Act.

Now, Mr. Speaker, out of courtesy for my colleague the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, I wish to adjourn debate on this matter.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed? The motion is carried.

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

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

Bill 215 Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998

THE CHAIRMAN: We'd now invite any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill.

The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak in committee to Bill 215, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998, and to introduce the amendments, which I have distributed to all members.

Mr. Chairman, these amendments do not change the purpose of this bill, which is to amend the Highway Traffic Act in order to allow the photographs taken by an unmanned red light enforcement system to stand alone as evidence in a court of law. This amendment I believe actually enhances the effectiveness of Bill 215.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take a moment to go through the proposed amendments.

THE CHAIRMAN: Just for the record, we'll call this amendment A1. Everybody, I assume, has a copy? Good.
Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you. The following will be added to section 5 of Bill 215. In

5.1 the following is added after section 173 of the Highway Traffic Act:

173.1(1) In any proceedings under which a person is charged with failing to comply with section 109, the evidence of any person involved in the installation, operation or use of a red light traffic enforcement device and the issuance of a violation ticket in respect of that failure to comply may be given by affidavit.

(2) An affidavit referred to in subsection (1) is, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, prima facie proof as to the facts stated in the affidavit.

(3) A copy of an affidavit referred to in subsection (1) must be served on the defendant by ordinary mail at that person's latest address, as indicated on the records of the Registrar of Motor Vehicle Services, at least 14 days before the date of the hearing.

(4) The defendant may, with leave of the court, require the attendance of any person giving evidence by affidavit pursuant to subsection (1) for the purpose of cross-examination.

Mr. Chairman, without these amendments the police service would be required to have the person testing the camera be present in court to testify each time as to the setup and the operation of the camera. The amendments that I have just tabled before you will allow the paper or certificate evidence to be brought into court instead of requiring attendance of the police officer to present the evidence.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, I would welcome debate on these amendments. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood on amendment A1.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As the mover of this amendment has stated, there has to be some particular legal requirement to enter certain evidence into the courts. When you do have and are using technology in law enforcement, be it a stand-alone radar site or radar equipment or laser radar or the traditional radar operated by police officers, everything has to be calibrated, and you have to know and be able to testify that you've taken certain steps to ensure that the equipment you are using was in proper working order at the time. I think this speaks to that.

The other aspect of it is that you must also establish the need for an affidavit to be signed, which is done for calibrations of many instruments: a breathalyzer, for one, and as I said, radar equipment. That in fact is part of the evidence in a courtroom. So I feel that this does in fact strengthen the Highway Traffic Act. The amendment doesn't leave anything open, and it ensures that there's not a number of other challenges to the particular instrument that's being used at the intersections where these are placed.

So I would speak in support of this amendment and support the entire bill in fact.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.
3:20

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I, too, want to speak on the amendment and support the amendment, but at the same time, in speaking to the amendment, one does tend to drift a bit.

What the amendment does is it makes the whole concept of what

the member is trying to achieve, law enforcement for violation of red light infractions, enforceable, practical to do, filling in those little technical glitches that may be there. When we look at the whole aspect of this type of violation, which this amendment of course leads to resolving to a degree, when we look at this type of amendment, Mr. Chairman, it's for a type of infraction that happens so often in this city, in any city in Alberta. I think we've all seen it as we approach intersections: people going through, barreling through a red light in the opposite direction, going the opposite way. It is a common occurrence, and as we see photo-radar for speeding, we kind of wonder: well, how come there's such a concentration on speeders and not on this type of violation, which occurs on such a regular basis?

The difficulty is one of enforcement. It's very difficult for police to park at an intersection to nail people going through a red light. This type of technology of course resolves that. The experiments that have been done, like out in Sherwood Park, have proven that it does reduce that infraction of people going through lights. In Sherwood Park at the present time, as in Edmonton and in Calgary, it's only being done to warn drivers. They're not getting a penalty. But at the same time stats are showing it is working.

So the bottom line is that the member has brought forward a good bill in Bill 215 with the accompanying amendment, that of course makes the whole question of enforcement and finalizing the penalty that much more practical. There will be those that say that it's unfair pool, that it's Big Brother and that, but it's like photoradar: if you don't speed, you're not going to get a ticket. Again, if you don't go through a red light, you're not going to get a ticket, and you're not going to be faced with that question of having to pay a fine or, if you choose, challenge it in the courts. So I do support the amendment, which of course will lead to supporting the bill.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to state my opposition to this amendment brought forward by my colleague from Redwater. Even though I agree with the concept of the bill, to improve the safety of our streets, I cannot support this amendment for several reasons.

Number one, I do not believe that we can have a technology that is a hundred percent foolproof, and that leads to the question of the rights of the defendant. Many of my constituents already have complained about the fact that photoradar is being used as a cash cow today by many police forces, that they are not being set up for safety reasons but are set up to make as much money as possible for the police department.

Looking at this amendment, when a person is accused of running a red light by the camera, the person has to go to court to fight the charge. Only at that time can he request that the people who are responsible for setting up the machine come into the courtroom after that to be cross-examined. I think that if that is the case, then it requires two court appearances for a person to have a proper defence. The cornerstone of our legal system is that everybody is assumed to be innocent until proven guilty, and the burden of proof should rest with the prosecutor, not the accuser. In this case it looks like the odds are stacked against the people accused of running the red light.

It is annoying enough to receive a picture charge in the mail that accuses you of doing something you may or may not have done one or two months before. Then you have to do your best to recollect what you did on that particular day in order to fight the charge. Now you have to go to court, and then you have to have another

adjournment to bring the people in so they can cross-examine them. I think that is really cumbersome.

As I mentioned earlier, I'll vote for the principle of the bill at second reading, but I do not support this amendment at this stage. I hope that we can find some way to balance the need to provide better safety on our streets and the rights of the people to cross-examine or question whenever they're being accused of doing something wrong.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, I'm very much in support of Bill 215, and I'm very much opposed to the amendment that's in front of us. I just want to go back and refresh the memory of members who may see this as being entirely innocuous. Recognize that this is still an offence. An accused person is still presumed to be innocent. It is still an absolutely fundamental, bedrock principle to our criminal justice system that the Crown bears the burden of proof in proving someone's guilt.

Now, what happens is this. As much as I support the bill, what the House amendment in front of us does is it allows the Crown a shortcut. I remember being involved in some negotiations with the Member for Calgary-Cross when we were looking at a somewhat similar provision, when we were amending the provincial offences act I think two years ago or maybe three years ago. At that time we were talking about affidavit evidence. I agreed with the proposition that when it comes to a speeding trial where they're using radar or laser, after 20 years of experience with the technology there have been numerous cases exploring the accuracy or the limitations of those kinds of devices and those kinds of features. I could see in that case that it was not irresponsible to take a shortcut to allow the Crown evidence to come in by way of affidavit. In that case the Member for Calgary-Cross accepted my two suggestions for an amendment.

The two suggestions are effectively what would be sub (3) and (4) of this, which required at least that notice had to be given to the accused person. I see it as a positive part of the amendment that there's that notice provision, but I have to stand back and say that when we're talking about red light traffic enforcement devices, photoradar is a relatively recent development. Its application in terms of identifying people running red lights is even more recent. There has not been the experience in terms of numerous cases being prosecuted in Alberta courts. There has not been an opportunity for judges to give opinion in terms of the kinds of standards that are required, in terms of checking the machine for accuracy.

I'd just remind members that the offence is not having a photograph taken that shows something particular; the offence is you have to have committed the offence of proceeding through a controlled intersection against a red light. I think that sometimes we get suckered a little bit by technology. I think sometimes we get bamboozled, overwhelmed, impressed with technology, and sometimes we tend to forget a fundamental thing: technology is rarely infallible. At least in my experience it's frequently found to be less than a hundred percent reliable.

Anyway, what I'm saying in short is this. Because this is a relatively new technology with a relatively new application proposed here – namely, monitoring people running red lights – I think this is not an appropriate case to allow this shortcut to allow affidavit evidence. The experience is generally that most people, when they receive the affidavit, are not going to appreciate that they still have the opportunity to require the police officer to come to court and give viva voce, or oral, evidence in the courtroom.

Clearly, I support the bill, and I'm going to be happy to support the bill when we get to vote on that. This amendment I think may be more appropriate after we've had five or six years' experience

with the photoradar technology in terms of red-light-running enforcement. We're not there yet. I think the shortcut is inappropriate.

I'd just end by saying that we have a responsibility to be vigilant. It's easy for people to say: "Well, it's only a red light offence, and it's only a motor vehicle offence. What's the big deal?" Well, the big deal is that if we go on and make it too casual a process and too relaxed a process, we forget that there are significant penalties available, that there are significant insurance implications. For all those reasons, I'm voting against the amendment.

Thank you very much.

3:30

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Edmonton-Calder.

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to compliment my colleague for bringing forward a series of amendments which make enforceable a private member's bill that addresses a very serious issue in our community. It seems to me, with all due respect to my colleague's comments about the long-term history of using technology as evidence in the way it's been outlined in the amendments, that there is a great deal of support for moving on the issue of speeding through red lights, which has unfortunately become a fact of life – or death, if you wish to really see the seriousness of it – in our community. I believe that the due diligence that's been done to find a series of amendments that makes a piece of legislation effective is something that should not go unnoticed in this Chamber.

We've heard some comments about the technical requirements with respect to calibration. We've also had some commentary on the legal proceedings, and I think it's not without due notice that working with the court system in order to ensure that effective use of our time before the courts is recognized is an important component of what this set of amendments is trying to accomplish.

I also feel that with respect to the effectiveness of our police officers, who are charged with the responsibility of providing safety for our communities, the reality is that where we are least safe is often at a red light. Giving them an opportunity to be effectively monitoring the health and safety of the community by using their resources with a complementary technological and more scientific method using photoradar is something we should endorse, enhance, and not hesitate at all to recognize.

I'm not certain that this Chamber is aware of some of the initiatives that are in place in our community with respect to traffic safety. I want to speak specifically in support of the amendments and the bill on behalf of two communities which concern me. Recently we have had in our health authority in Calgary a task force that was established specifically to look at traffic safety as one of the leading causes in the rising cost of health care. This task force has been at work for I think about 18 months, Mr. Chairman. Interestingly enough, the issue of speeding and disregard for the legally recognized restraints within our community around intersections is the cause of a major problem in the community and a focus of our health authorities and a very, very broad number of stakeholders. I have been very happy to liaise, I might share with the Member for Redwater, with that task force and watch this bill's progress with interest.

I think when the community has come out to voluntarily work at an issue and the bill is projected to address some of those concerns and then further diligence is brought to bear on the bill via a series of amendments, we should be looking at every opportunity to give it due consideration, if only to support those initiatives which our

community has identified. That's consistent, quite frankly, with my colleague the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat when he talked about bottom-up and top-down initiatives. This is a grassroots private member's bill raised within his community because of a serious concern, endorsed by some of the largest urban centres in our province, and with technical work done in order to find a legal way to bring it forward on behalf of the people who (a) need it and (b) have to enforce it.

Secondly, within my own constituency the community of Elbow Park, which I share with the Member for Calgary-Elbow, our Premier, has had a serious review of traffic issues, particularly along Elbow Drive right through the central part of the city. One of the discussion points is whether or not we could effectively reduce speed limits to 40 kilometres per hour in all of our central areas, not so much because of the need to control traffic – obviously people need to commute – but because the fact of the matter is that there is such a rampant disregard for the highway traffic and safety legislation that is in place that more draconian measures are needed. Now, this community is speaking on behalf of its residents and I also think providing a voice for the children in our community, who are not aware just because of their carefree nature of some of the imminent dangers that come with crossing intersections.

I think that when we see an effort made to draw together a very strong community issue, an issue that requires a fair amount of manpower, person power, in order to implement it but has the good of the community at heart, and then we come forward with a series of amendments taking the original concept of the bill, making a public statement about running red lights, taking the time and effort of this Legislature to review it, we should be responsive in recognizing the effectiveness of these amendments.

I know that my colleague has been working very significantly with the Minister of Transportation and Utilities and the Minister of Justice with respect to the legislation that's in place for our highway safety. I think the fact that they've come up with a series of amendments that recognize where technology is, that recognize court process, that complement the role of the legal community in successfully prosecuting those who are in violation, gives us an opportunity not to allow people to flagrantly abuse the legislation but to in fact be called into question for the operation of their vehicles in an unsafe manner, putting our communities at risk.

The specific element that allows our policing community to more effectively deal with violations under the Highway Traffic Act is a recognition that their responsibilities belong in the broad community, and the fact that there is support for them to utilize technology and other resources of our system recognizes that these people's service belongs out in the community in perhaps a way that, had the legislation not been amended, would not be able to be accommodated.

Mr. Chairman, I'm just pleased to endorse the technical work that's been done and the diligence done to bring forward these amendments. I think this is an appropriate use of private members' bills, in order to fine-tune legislation that comes from a grassroots initiative, a grassroots initiative, I might say, that has at its very heart the life and safety of our communities and our children. It respects the legal community, which has a responsibility to serve both the prosecution and the defence, recognizes the appropriate use of our policing community, and supports overall some of the more serious issues of traffic safety that we have to deal with in our communities.

So I compliment the member for his work on the amendments and look forward to further debate on them. Thank you.

3:40

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on the amendment.

MR. WHITE: Speaking to the amendment, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to compliment the Member for Redwater for bringing this bill forward and this amendment also, which I support. This amendment is a very reasonable amendment. Now, I know there are those, particularly the Member for Calgary-Edmonton, that'll say that this is an affront to all there is in natural law, in particular going back as far as the Magna Carta. But about two sentences later he said: but in five years from now it's okay. Well, wait a minute here. No offence intended here, sir, but there are some of us that are technocrats and others that are not.

The technology involved here was first the photograph, which was invented in about 1840, and the traffic light, which was an innovation in the very early part of this century. The evidence here is a photograph of a licence plate of numbers, which were derived shortly after the Romans came on the scene, on the licence plate of an automobile with, in the background, a light that clearly says it is red, which means that an automobile has gone through that.

Now, I don't know how you expect a police officer to have to show up at some court hearing that asks: was that light red? "Well, sir, looking at this photograph, yes, it is red." "Sir, is the light calibrated?" "Well, it's on. I don't know how you have to calibrate a light such as that." As to the test of the authenticity of a photograph, yes, in fact it could be doctored. There are a number of people within this Chamber that have the wherewithal to change the look of a photograph on a PC – that's a personal computer; the other kind of PC doesn't change a whole lot in its colours.

The facts are that this is a simple amendment that was missed in the early part of the drafting of the amendment to the Highway Traffic Act, and quite frankly it's a reasonable one. The Member for Calgary-Currie went through a great deal of effort to explain that this is community generated. The Member for Edmonton-Rutherford added to the debate on the safety of life and limb for all of us. The facts are quite plain that most accidents occur at intersections.

If you really wanted to back up and say, "Well, if photoradar is okay, this is half the technology and in fact is at the specific location where the accidents occur," which does not always occur with photoradar – it can happen virtually anywhere. In fact, I would agree with some that sometimes it's enforced in locations where it really should not be enforced. But this kind of technology, as simple as it is, cannot be enforced where it should not be enforced. Whether it's 3 a.m. or high noon, at an intersection one should not be found driving an automobile through a light that is red. This is not high tech. This is not very difficult to understand. In fact a court of law should not be called upon to verify the authenticity of a simple photograph and/or the calibration of a light, both of which were invented well in the last century.

Thank you, sir.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Redwater to close debate on the amendment.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank both sides of the Assembly for their comments and their support of the amendment, and I would close debate.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE CHAIRMAN: On the bill itself, do we have further comments, amendments?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. I just want to add my words to this particular bill as well. For those members who may not be aware – but the member who has put the bill forward is aware – the first traffic light that will be able to have this enforcement device happens to be in the constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. I was at the opening ceremonies, if you want to call it that, a couple of weeks ago, and I must say that I was amazed by the technology and the ability for there to be viewing of cars that actually violate a red light. There can be no doubt, I believe, in anyone's mind when they receive a ticket that they have in fact violated the red light. The picture that they receive, for those who are not aware, indicates not only the fact that they violated the red light, but it shows how long that red light has been in operation as well as at what point in time the car passed and for how long that red light has been on. It also tells you how fast you've been going.

When I talked about the red light traffic enforcement device at a couple of high schools that I went to visit, afterwards the students were all amazed at the ability that they could now be caught. Their biggest worry was: is it going to be on every street corner? They did question the need for it, but it became quite obvious in discussions that what they were also trying to figure out was how in fact they could avoid getting caught and still run the red. When I indicated that that was not a possibility, in my mind I know for sure that at that particular corner we are not going to be seeing a lot of red lights run.

If it is to provide safety, if it is to ensure that lives are not lost, if it is to ensure that individuals are not injured, I don't believe that anyone in this Assembly can vote against this particular bill. For those that argue that it is nothing but a cash cow, my response is: if you don't cross the red light, then you don't pay the fine. I make the comparison that if I go to a store and shop, then I pay. If I go to the store and don't wish to buy an item, then obviously I don't pay. So in fact by crossing that red, I have bought my fine.

I would like to again just add my congratulations to the member that's brought this forward, and I hope that we will see speedy passage of this particular bill and even speedier passage of the bill into actual reality. Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It looks like the bill is going to pass, and I just have a couple of questions I would like to address to the Member for Redwater.

For the past few years I had a few cases when I stopped at an intersection and saw that the lights from both sides were red. There was a technical problem with the lights at that time. I'm just wondering: in the future, if I'm in that situation, should I stop my car and do a reverse or do a U-turn so as to avoid being caught on camera running the red light? In your discussion with the department or with whoever is going to implement your bill, I hope that you do bring up that point, because there were three or four times at least that I was caught in that position, and somehow we have to address that.

Also, I think that we have to do a good job of educating people, too, because we are having a very severe, cold winter in Alberta, and the road conditions are usually less than perfect. It is your view that people are trying to race so fast when they see the yellow light that it could cause accidents with people who are following them. That is also another factor that we have to consider when we

are implementing the bill. We have to do more education of drivers on the street. They may want to be fined 50 bucks rather than sometime killing two or three drivers behind them.

Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to bring to light a couple of comments that came out in my community on the discussion of traffic-light tickets provided through photoradar. Most of the people supported it. Let me start with that idea. But there was a little bit of a concern about what is effectively developing into a two-tiered system of traffic ticketing: you know, those that you get when an officer of the law comes along and gives you a ticket, goes and gives you demerits associated with your driver's licence, but if you do exactly the same crime and get caught by a technology, it gets associated with your vehicle as opposed to your driver's licence and you don't get the demerits.

So what in essence you end up with is that we're developing a two-tiered system of traffic enforcement and violation, and I think that as legislators we need to start now and think about how we can develop some degree of equity here in terms of making sure that a person who gets a violation is treated on an equal basis. I just would like to put that into the record on behalf of the constituents who raised that when they came in and talked about this bill and would ask that maybe this is something that as legislators we should be looking at, we should be trying to deal with. We want to make sure that people don't feel discriminated against, feel that they're being treated differently than someone else who has done exactly the same thing in the context of a violation of our traffic code.

So with that I'd just like to congratulate the Member for Redwater. This is a bill that should be supported by everyone. I hope that I never get caught, but I also hope that it slows down and reduces the number of people who violate red lights.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3:50

THE CHAIRMAN: The Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise and speak in committee on Bill 215. I find myself agreeing somewhat with the debate from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo and now from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East. The concern I have with respect to this is that it does appear that it's a really convenient shortcut with respect to law enforcement. While I certainly respect the fact that chances are that the intended outcome, which is to reduce the number of people driving through red lights, will be achieved with this technology, I do have some real concerns with respect to what that does in the long term in the erosion of law enforcement, from the point of view that you get fewer and fewer interactions with a real live policeman stopping you and checking your credentials, your documents – your driver's licence, your insurance – and also checking your record to see if in fact you have outstanding warrants and so on. I'm hearing comments from people in the insurance industry, for example, who are saying that there are more and more people driving without insurance these days. If the chances are that the more electronics we use in enforcement, the less the chance is that you're going to be pulled over by a real live policeman, then it may in fact encourage people to take a chance and drive without appropriate registration or licences, drive while impaired or without insurance and so on.

I caution with respect to this sort of thing, and I simply request the hon. member to be very diligent with the minister and the department to ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the effectiveness of the enforcement systems we have. It's not difficult to keep track of the number of times, for example, that a police officer stops a vehicle for whatever reason, because that licence number is put through a computer immediately. The person's identity is checked, whether or not they've got a valid driver's licence. Their papers are checked to see whether or not they have valid insurance. Their record is checked to see if they have outstanding warrants. So obviously a record of that is kept somewhere.

If this is to be effective, then I would certainly urge the minister to make sure that there is a system in place whereby we can monitor the effectiveness of the personal interactions between a policeman and a citizen so that we don't get on the slippery slope of fewer and fewer actual interactions between law enforcement and citizens. What happens then is that more and more people take the chance of doing things that they would not do otherwise because of the red and blue light in their back window.

It's sort of interesting that in Calgary there was a citizen that put up a cardboard cutout of a policeman with a radar gun, and I understand that the speed on that street just dropped dramatically.

You know, this is very expensive technology that we're talking about here. It's a very high cost per intersection. How many policeman could we in fact hire for the cost of doing 10 or 20 of these intersections? So let's not get on the slippery slope of thinking that technology will look after enforcement, because the interaction between a real live policeman and a citizen I think is still very important. I would urge the minister to make sure that there's a measurement system in place to measure whether or not they are enforcing the law appropriately before we get too far down the road here.

So with that, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Just a couple of comments on the bill itself after having spoken to the amendment. Some arguments have been made, and the last member talked in terms of that live contact, that face-to-face contact between the police officer and the motorist. The difficulty at the present time when we talk in terms of red-light infractions is that there is no enforcement to speak of. That interaction is presently not taking place. I'm sure that our Member for Edmonton-Norwood, who has experienced that, would be able to confirm the difficulties a police officer would have in issuing tickets and the struggle in trying to enforce that in the court, because there is no hard, concrete evidence.

I acknowledge and respect what the last speaker said. There is a need for that type of interaction, and that type of interaction does take place at several locations. We have it during the normal safety checks, during the checkpoints where the police set up and stop motorists. That's the type of situation where I think we see that face-to-face interaction the member is talking about.

Another argument that was made dealt with sort of natural justice. I can point out a situation where an individual I know was making a left-hand turn and got into the intersection with another motorist that was also turning left, two lanes turning left. An individual coming from the other direction stopped for the light, which had now turned red, but the motorist behind whipped around that taxi and barreled through, hitting one car and bouncing off it to the other. Now, the police officers involved charged the two motorists making the left-hand turn even though the fault was with

the individual coming through the red light. The constables that arrived on the scene issued tickets to those two individuals. However, when one of the two motorists chose to take it to court, a judge did rule differently. Had there been a camera at that intersection, the evidence would have been so clear that that one motorist had come through a red light, preventing the necessity for another motorist having to hire a lawyer at a considerable cost, having to fight the thing in the court, and risk having insurance rates increase considerably. So when we talk about natural justice, it works both ways. This thing is only going to hit those people who in fact do break the highway motor act.

On that note I'll conclude.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 215, the Highway Traffic Amendment Act. I've had the opportunity to read the proposed amendments, and in many respects I agree with the rationale behind the proposed bill. Certainly I agree that traffic law enforcement is a necessary tool that police departments must use to ensure that people obey the laws of our roads and to ensure greater safety on our roads. I also agree that regular police patrols cannot catch as many red-light runners, and therefore the disincentive to run a red light is less when compared with using a red-light photo device. I am aware and agree with the positions of the Edmonton and Calgary police departments, who strongly support the use of red-light photo devices. I am also aware of the Insurance Bureau of Canada's position with respect to red-light photos. Certainly I have had the experience of seeing people run red lights, and anything that can be done to reduce that practice and reduce the incidence of collisions as a result of it I think is a good view.

4:00

However, as I read the premise of the amendments, I kept asking: why are these not in regulations? Did a consultation occur between the government member and the minister of transportation on this matter? Why would we suggest that a red-light photo device should be incorporated as an amendment to an act when we have a precedent in this province of putting other things as important as health care services in regulation? So if we put health care services in regulation and some of the very instructive directives as to how our health system is to be run in regulation, why do we put a red-light device in the act?

An additional argument that is made on that point is that what if new technology arises where all of a sudden the red-light device really becomes obsolete? Then we have to come back to the Legislature and go through another formalized debate.

So the premise of the amendment to the Highway Traffic Act I am questioning. At this point I guess I'm questioning the rationale for it being a formal amendment rather than something that could have been incorporated in regulations. I don't think, Mr. Chairman, that aspect has been covered in the debate thus far. I'd be very interested in hearing from the sponsor of the bill why you just didn't pursue having this made as a regulation inclusion instead of bringing it to the Legislature, because if a new device comes about and the red-light device is obsolete, we'll be back here removing the amendment from the act.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With those comments I conclude my debate.

THE CHAIRMAN: Would the committee please give unanimous consent to the brief return to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE CHAIRMAN: Opposed?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank members for this opportunity. I want to introduce a very distinguished gentleman in the gallery, Mr. Steven Jenuth. He's a lawyer in the city of Calgary who's been exceedingly active in a host of civil liberties concerns. He led the challenge around the prisoner voting issue and I know has got a keen interest in the progress of certain bills that are before the Assembly. So if everybody would please give a warm welcome to Mr. Jenuth.

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

Bill 215
Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998
(*continued*)

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to make a couple of comments. The Member for Calgary-Egmont spoke to the continuing need to have one-on-one contact with a police member when they're being issued a ticket. I agree that when you're issuing a summons to somebody, that is an ideal kind of interaction to have, because you know there are many times that other crimes are solved as a result of one-on-one contact between a police officer and an individual.

However, I would like to make this comment. I absolutely support the notion of photoradar, and I support the notion of the red-light cameras. I do support the notion of the issue of affidavits in the amendment and how it's proposed, but I would suggest that if you want to have more one-on-one and less argument about how revenue is generated through technology and taking away from the policeman's responsibility, we might consider the cost-cutting that has occurred through the municipal funding sources for municipal policing grants. There are no longer municipal policing grants. The millions of dollars that existed there no longer exist, and the major police departments have been cut back by about \$10.2 million. So fewer police members in the larger services result in the need to turn to some technology and those kinds of enforcement initiatives.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

So unless this government is prepared to increase funding to police agencies and to support the public safety initiatives in that respect, then I fail to see the argument made by the Member for Calgary-Egmont and would suggest that maybe he could encourage his government to in fact increase funding to all policing agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question, hon. members? I see no one standing. We are here discussing Bill 215, that being the Highway Traffic Amendment Act as presented by the hon. Member for Redwater. Are there any final comments or questions or amendments with respect to this bill? None?

[The clauses of Bill 215 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Those opposed? I think that, too, is carried.

The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: No. Just the hon. Member for Highwood.

THE ACTING CHAIRMAN: Also known as the hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Chairman, I would move that the committee now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

4:10

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill, that being Bill 215, along with certain amendments. I wish to table copies of all those amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of our Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

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

Bill 217
Alberta Economic Development Authority
Amendment Act, 1998

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to begin second reading of Bill 217, the Alberta Economic Development Authority Amendment Act.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, allows for regional economic development councils to be recognized by the Alberta Economic Development Authority. Regional councils are intended to fill a void that was created when regional planning commissions were disbanded after the introduction of the Municipal Government Act.

[Mr. Zwozdesky in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, Bill 217 is designed to have regional economic development councils prepare regional action plans that would be filed with the Minister of Economic Development. This provision is intended to keep the province up to speed with the planning and development strategies of the regions involved. As it is important for the municipalities of a region to co-ordinate their planning and economic activities, it is also important that the province co-ordinate the planning and development of various regions. This bill ensures that this co-ordination and co-operation will continue.

This bill also, because there is currently a lot of competition but very little co-ordination amongst chambers of commerce across the province, has perhaps prevented the development and implementation of unified economic development plans for regions that could benefit all Albertans. Regional economic development councils will help bring the people of each region together to make decisions about economic development and planning, both short- and long-term. Regional economic development councils would give the municipalities of a given region of the province an organization through which to co-ordinate and integrate economic development goals and to do short- and long-term planning. This does not exist presently.

Rather than working at odds with one another by participating in regional economic development councils, municipalities will have a chance to pool their ideas and resources in trying to attract investment opportunities to their region. By working as a unit, the municipalities of a region could expand their abilities to develop tourism, industrial projects, and any other economic development opportunities that might not be feasible for any one of the municipalities alone.

Mr. Speaker, other provinces have established similar regional-based organizations with very good success. I'll give a couple of examples. The Saskatchewan regional economic development authority initiative has been quite successful. This approach to community economic development encourages groups of communities to work together with the private co-operatives and the public sector to meet the shared goals of partnership, co-ordination, organization stability and service in regional trading areas. In phase 1 start-up funds are available on a cost-shared basis to assist in the formation of regional economic development authorities. In phase 2 cost-shared funding is available to help established regional economic development authorities build their service capacity and form partnerships with provincial government departments and co-operatives in the private sector.

The primary function of the Nova Scotia regional economic development authority is to integrate and co-ordinate the activities of all local development groups and/or undertake activities itself to accomplish common objectives within the region. Ultimately this is so communities can build competitiveness and capitalize on market opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I realize that just because something works in one province does not necessarily mean that it will work in our province. However, I believe that we should be aware of these programs in other jurisdictions and consider them very closely for implementation in Alberta.

The formal recognition of regional economic development councils would contribute to meeting Alberta Economic Development Authority's goal of building self-reliant communities. This would be done by attracting investment and economic development opportunities to a region. The new jobs associated with these kinds of projects will help the communities of the region to become more self-sufficient and self-reliant. In turn, the province will also have a short- and long-range co-ordinated economic action plan.

The regional economic development councils will also go a long

way towards helping Alberta Economic Development respond to the needs of the private sector. Regional economic development councils will have the ability to act as a liaison for the private sector in terms of planning, infrastructure, and other needs of the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, yet another important thing that regional economic development councils could do is to bring the municipalities of a region together in order to come up with ideas and find solutions to common problems or issues. The councils will be a forum in which the representatives of municipalities can communicate the needs and priorities of their respective areas.

Mr. Speaker, this would also allow the municipalities to start working together in their region with the possibility of finally forming regional governments. As you are aware, we presently have, I believe, 360 or so municipalities in Alberta for just over 3 million people, and this process may be one way of allowing the municipalities to start working together and possibly forming regional governments in the future.

Also, municipalities will get a broader perspective as to what sort of economic development would be beneficial for the region and indeed for all of Alberta. By working together, the municipalities of a region will attract much larger economic development projects than would be possible if they did it individually. I'll give you just a quick example of a couple of projects.

One of the projects presently proposed is the heavy oil project to go into the Fort McMurray region. The Mobil Oil project is looking at two different sites, possibly the Fort McMurray region and maybe Edmonton or the Fort Saskatchewan region. Those are the only two sites being looked at right now, Mr. Speaker, but there is no reason why a project like that could not go on a site between here and Fort McMurray. That is one example.

The other one is a project like Al-Pac, Mr. Speaker. It was only through a very active regional economic development council and a government that listens that the project was developed, because the project was initiated by five or six municipalities working together, selecting a site to extract the resource. That particular project they set in the middle of at least five or six communities in northern Alberta that accessed jobs and business opportunities. So it is quite important that projects go this direction.

There is clearly a place, Mr. Speaker, for these organizations in promoting economic development in Alberta and planning for our future, both short and long term.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, please.

4:20

DR. NICOL: Thank you. It gives me real pleasure to rise this afternoon and speak to Bill 217. It's basically a bill that is suggesting the replacement of the regional planning commissions or kind of a son of or a daughter of the regional planning commission idea that many of the communities had in place up until about 1994-95. So what we're looking at is: is this option or this proposal going to give us something that was better than those regional planning commissions?

For whatever reasons, they were removed from the operation of the economic development planning in the province, and we end up with a situation where now the local municipalities are left to operate on their own initiatives or else through their ability to work in co-operation with the Alberta Economic Development Authority, kind of the provincial umbrella group that deals with the planning, the prioritization, the initiatives and policy-making that are associated

with promoting the economic growth of the province.

I guess we're left here trying to develop a balance between: can provincial or province-level agencies do the appropriate planning that's necessary or that's appropriate – I guess "appropriate" is by far the better word there – for local economic development initiatives? Are they familiar enough with the players in the local community to be able to understand and work with the appropriate support groups, the suppliers and buyers of product that comes out of a project?

This is the kind of concern that results from how we look at what the role is and what the mandate is of economic development planning across the province. As we look at our structure right now, we're left with the Alberta Economic Development Authority at the top, then dealing with local municipalities at the bottom.

In the context of looking at economic development, I support many of the comments that the supporter of our bill brought forward when he talked about the idea that it's important to develop a balance within a geographic area. We don't need concentration all in one spot, especially when there's no real necessary infrastructure or no necessary compatibility with duplication at the same site. So these are the things that are important to look at.

As we start to think about the application of this and how we put it together, I was kind of disappointed, listening to the sponsor, that there's no suggestion in his discussion in terms of the makeup of the council. Who's going to serve on the local council as it gets put together to deal with developing initiatives? In a lot of cases – and this is something I've noticed a little bit in some of the regions – we end up with competing interests trying to develop alternative projects in the same community or the same relative part of the province. We also have cases in some instances where competing plants are there, and you end up, then, with teams and opposites sides. You get different groups trying to support bringing this industry in or bringing this member of that industry in, where somebody else wants a different industry or a different member from the industry. So we have to decide as we put this together how an economic development council like this would be staffed. Who would serve on it? Would it be a representative from each of the municipalities? Would it be appointments? Would they be appointed, or would they be transitory? I think this is the issue I want to get at.

You know, the bill suggests five municipalities or such working together. Well, in following economic development initiatives in a lot of the areas, it's not necessarily the municipality that works at bringing in a new industry; it's more the support industry groups. I'll give you some examples that I've been associated with in southern Alberta, where we're trying to bring in the new potato plants that are coming into the irrigated district around Taber. Those were courted, if we might use the word, by the producers, by some of the suppliers of machinery and equipment in support of that industry, some of the people who are input suppliers to that process. So these are the groups. You know, I guess the idea here is really what we need in Alberta. We need a structure whereby local interest groups can get together without being confined to a currently defined geographic area like a municipality, a town, a village, or a city.

We've got to have an encouragement, and this is what I find so attractive about this bill, in the sense that it does broaden the perspective of development over a region. There are very few of our economic development initiatives now, especially when we deal outside the major centres, Edmonton and Calgary in Alberta, that have to deal with multimunicipal jurisdictions. We have to be able to work with a town, a rural community that's associated with it, a county or a municipal district that surrounds that town. Even in

Lethbridge, where we think we are an economic city, very little goes on in the city that doesn't have an impact on or needs support from the towns and counties and municipalities that surround it. So we've got to look at that structure.

I appreciate the fact that the bill suggests only five as a minimum, because in a lot of cases you're going to have to deal with more than five local jurisdictions to be able to develop that. When we get out and working in some of these areas – I know in areas of northern Alberta the small jurisdictions are a lot farther apart than they are in southern Alberta, so they probably can work more independently. But when we get into central and southern Alberta, in a lot of these cases five is kind of a critical mass that's necessary to start that work, but we also want to be able to encourage it to spread beyond.

I know that when the Oldman River dam was being promoted and supported in southern Alberta, there were something like 25 or 26 different municipal jurisdictions – towns, cities, municipalities, counties – that were all working in support of that kind of a jurisdiction. I like the idea that the bill leaves open the upper end of this. It also, I think, would be improved if we could, based on the initiative, have these things flexible. So sometimes it might be these four or five that work together, where on a different project it might be two of those and two or three others or maybe 10 others, in the sense that on a different project it could be maybe a different makeup. We almost want to look at this bill establishing a precedence for a suggestion to the Alberta Economic Development Authority that they, under their mandate, create a structure and an encouragement for issue-centred development planning councils or whatever we want to call them.

We might have one working in the north that's dealing with a heavy extraction plant, an upgrader. We might have another one that's dealing with some process that would take some of the paper mill products and value add to them, but it would be a different group because we would have to have people in this group that are technical, in some way knowledgeable of the industry they're trying to promote. So you might have a couple of them working at the same time, overlap, but still be taking different initiatives.

4:30

You know, we looked at how the regional planning commissions worked before. A lot of them became too rigid, too bureaucratic, too focused instead of being responsive to the way the community was. If these councils could be set up to be project responsive, project initiated, then I think they would be much more community accepted as opposed to something that is there all the time. It almost gets the perception of a big brother watching over, if it's there. I know on a number of occasions with some of the regional planning commissions that were in place, before a lot of the initiatives were undertaken to bring in a new business or a new development, the regional planning commission almost became a deterrent. It got in the way, and people became suspicious of it, kind of looking at it as a big brother looking over our shoulder.

So this is the kind of structure that we need, the kind of flexibility that I'd like to see built into this. I guess that's when we have to start looking at whether or not the implication here is for a permanent, ongoing, everyday, year-after-year type structure or whether this can be flexible enough to vary when you want to put together a different project so that it can take in two or three different municipalities. It might take in a different board, different individuals on that appointed from the relevant municipalities that are involved.

We have to look at how it can be issue specific, and I think this is where we end up with kind of a question as to what we really

want out of local joint development authorities or development councils. This leads us to kind of a flexible system, but it also leads to some problems. The proposal as presented here in the bill provides us with a real good opportunity to develop some consistency. It also provides us with the opportunity to develop accountability and funding. So if they do end up with funding sources that come from the local municipalities or from the province or from business contributions, there's a definite structure there to develop the accountability. If we have the more flexible position or the more flexible system that I was talking about a minute ago, a much stronger reporting and accountability system would have to be put in place.

This also then leads us to the issue of: how do we deal with funding for such an activity? Now, do you then go to the five or six or seven municipalities that are associated with this council and say: okay; now each of you should contribute based on some perceived benefit or some perceived contribution ratio or some population base? How do you decide what would be an appropriate relative contribution of the five or more jurisdictions that are involved? If you go outside and say, "Okay; we need to have outside funding from industry support, from potentially supportive side industries," how do we make sure that there is some relationship between the people who contribute to it and the people who will eventually get the benefit from it? We end up in a lot of cases like this, when it's a voluntary funding situation, that some of the people who get the biggest benefit from the spin-off from a new industry are not necessarily the ones who actively supported it and brought the community into a unified voice in support of it.

These kinds of issues are not addressed in the context of how we would see these councils being set up. I think we have to look at that in the framework of how we want to organize, structure, and promote local economic development. With a committee that's there, we're almost going to be asking them to go out and make work for themselves. If these councils were activity-specific – if you wanted to search out or promote your communities in the context of trying to attract a business, they could be struck, operate for that level of time, and then be disbanded until a new initiative would come along. I think this is the kind of structure that suits the needs of regional planning in a better way.

Now, I guess the other aspect in the context of looking at it is that as I looked through the clauses of the bill, it was just more or less an enabling piece of legislation as opposed to a defining of purpose. We didn't see that the authority was going to be charged with any responsibility. This doesn't give them the mandate, then, to be there to supervise and make sure that all of the relevant municipalities who are going to be impacted or potentially benefited by a new development project would be informed about the consequences. You know, if you end up with one group of municipalities getting together and they leave out a downstream municipality and then they bring in a new activity which passes on – potentially it's maybe environmental pollution, or it's downstream activities associated with a detrimental effect of any measurable kind. Even if it's highway traffic or road deterioration or any of these other aspects and that particular one is left out of the planning agency, then how do we deal with that kind of activity?

So if the mandate of this council is going to be to make sure that all aspects are taken care of, then it goes back almost to the regional planning commission mandate and role, where it was more a supervisory, regulatory, enabling agency as opposed to a promotion, encouragement, development, functional agency. I think we need to have a little better explanation of what way that is going. When I read the bill, I didn't see that. I was hoping some kind of mandate would be given in the introduction to the bill, but

if it was there, I missed it, and I apologize to the member. We'll have to look at that as we go through further debate, because in essence what we've got, as I said, is an enabling piece of legislation without a clear definition of what would be the mandate for these councils that would give us a feeling of comfort that they're not going to just be another level of government.

One of the things that we'd have to look at if we really wanted to promote and develop direct relationships in our economic development in terms of the payers and the receivers of benefit is: is there a possibility within this structure to give them revenue-generating authority, in essence create a third level of quasi-government? Maybe what we need to do is have these groups in there as an agency that would encourage amalgamation of some of our current municipal governments. This might be a very beneficial effect of this kind of thing. If this were the end result, it would probably be to our benefit, because then it would bring together that co-ordination.

With those comments, I'll rest and listen to some of the other members and when we get into committee will probably have more to say about it. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and join the debate on Bill 217, the Economic Development Authority Amendment Act. I applaud the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca for bringing this bill forward. I fully realize that the intent of this bill is to give municipalities an institution, that being the mechanism of an authority in which they can work together and make planning and economic development decisions that could benefit both individual municipalities and in the broader context of regionalization of the province. I think the idea is a good one and it has tremendous merit, but I'm a little concerned about some parts of the bill. As it's designed, maybe it might not be the answer for these municipalities.

Bill 217 allows for recognition and support of regional economic development councils and to establish the requirements for a regional economic development council to be recognized by the Alberta Economic Development Authority. Regional economic development councils would then be in a position to prepare regional action plans which could then be filed with the minister responsible. The hon. member outlined that very effectively in his first speech asking for Bill 217 to go through second reading.

4:40

Regional economic development councils may serve to fill that void that was created when 11 regional planning commissions were dissolved after the Municipal Government Act came into force. Those planning commissions grew out of municipal planning commissions in the 1950s in order to co-ordinate regional plans, which was a very good idea. Eventually these regions covered close to 70 percent of the province. Representatives on the regional planning commissions were drawn from the councils in the region. The commissions brought together a number of municipalities so that municipal planning could be done without losing sight of the broader planning needs and priorities of the region. Regional planning commissions were funded jointly by the Alberta planning fund and by municipalities. In 1994 funding by the Alberta planning fund accounted for 40 percent. This bill would recreate a similar arrangement, whereby regional economic development councils would be funded collectively by the Alberta government and by the respective municipalities and more importantly, I

believe, by the private industry in that particular or that given region.

Regional economic development councils could potentially serve a number of important purposes. Firstly, currently municipalities often have a tendency to act on their own or in their own self-interest rather than working together to promote the best interests of the entire region. Regional economic development councils have a potential to facilitate co-operation between those municipalities in that given region.

Secondly, regional economic development councils could foster joint municipal relationships for long-term and short-term planning.

Thirdly, regional economic development councils could facilitate the co-ordination of the private sector or private interests and also look at investment among different Alberta regions.

Fourthly, the regional economic development councils would help the Alberta Economic Development Authority meet its goal of building self-reliant communities, as outlined in the Department of Economic Development's 1996-1997 annual report.

Fifthly, by encouraging municipalities to work together, the regional economic development councils would encourage a streamlining of administrations and their efficiencies.

Lastly and what I think is most important, by promoting and assisting with economic development, regional economic development councils would allow for the development and implementation of a unified economic development plan to benefit municipalities, regions, and ultimately all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, other provinces have implemented certain similar programs and initiatives to promote regional economic development with varying degrees of success. The Member for Athabasca-Wabasca briefly pointed out how the Saskatchewan regional economic development authority takes an approach to community economic development that encourages groups of communities to work in partnership with private, co-operative, and public sectors to achieve and share goals of partnerships, look at co-ordination, and develop an organizational stability that will service regional trading areas. The program has been somewhat effective in stimulating economic development and bringing communities together. He also mentioned that Nova Scotia's regional development authorities integrate the activities of all developmental groups and undertake activities themselves to reach common objectives within the region.

The primary objective of Alberta Economic Development is to co-ordinate and facilitate the implementation of the government of Alberta's economic development strategy. It is possible that regional economic development councils could contribute to this objective by bringing municipalities together to make decisions about planning and economic development with a regional focus. However, Mr. Speaker, I think the success of this government in stimulating and co-ordinating economic development is clearly reflected in the economic growth rates of the past several years. Alberta continues to lead the way in terms of economic growth, job creation, weekly earnings, and most other indicators of economic performance. This is one reason why I question the real need for formally structured regional economic development councils as proposed in the bill.

I've looked at other organizations in Alberta that already serve most of the functions that this bill comes forward with in its purpose, that of regional economic development councils and what they would try to carry out. A prime example, I think, of this is the idea of what Prosperity South formulated in the last few years. Its whole idea is a grassroots network of municipalities and businesses and community groups that were committed to developing co-operative and mutual support for each other to create

prosperous and sustainable communities in southern Alberta. Prosperity South works towards more than just economic development. Although economic development is still its priority, the emphasis of the organization is on prosperity and sustainable development. It is not just about businesses and has a wider scope than what a chamber of commerce would try to accomplish.

There are about 400 people working within the network of Prosperity South, and one of their present initiatives is to help communities adapt to the knowledge-based world. The participants of Prosperity South have found ways and means of establishing a lot closer collaboration in information and resource sharing. This co-operation has been focused on four key areas, those being capital development, economic development and tourism, education and training, and information needs and networks.

Mr. Speaker, another organization which already serves some of the functions that regional economic development councils would serve is the Northern Alberta Development Council. The Northern Alberta Development Council contributes to economic development in northern Alberta by leveraging their resources in partnership with the private sector – and that's an important thing to remember again – and community-based organizations. The council promotes economic development opportunities by implementing initiatives in conjunction with the private sector, with community-based agencies, and with government agencies to develop and implement those kinds of strategies that they think are important to them. The group focuses in practical ways on how to take advantage of the opportunities for development in northern Alberta.

Besides these two organizations, Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Economic Development Authority has 10 regional offices that offer economic and business services throughout this province. Regional offices have traditionally worked with communities and economic development agencies in both a supportive capacity to specific communities or regionally based initiatives and as a facilitator, where they act to assist in planning for long-range community development strategies. The Alberta Economic Development Authority's regional offices are instrumental in introducing specific programs that support individual and regionally based development programs. There are also a number of regions of the province that are beginning to undertake and to explore the formation of regional economic development structures, but they're doing so on their own in situations where structures are deemed to be necessary and desirable.

4:50

Since regional planning commissions were dissolved, Alberta's economy has grown rapidly and steadily. Alberta's communities continue to be strong, vibrant, and healthy, and we'd like to keep them that way. That's one of the reasons why we're all here. Where municipalities have recognized a need to co-operate and communicate in economic development planning, they have done so, and they will continue to do so. I think that is the best approach this government can take: to encourage and support the local efforts rather than impose a new structure and a new set of requirements basically coming from above. I would rather see something come from the local level or from the grassroots level, such as what Prosperity South has been able to do.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I understand the hon. member's intentions with the bill, and I understand the particular situations that are apparent in northern Alberta. I wholeheartedly appreciate his efforts to help his communities within his constituency grow and prosper, and I think every person in this Legislature is committed to building strong communities and maintaining our economies all across this province. In fact, it is

with strong, healthy communities that Alberta has become such a prosperous province and Canada such a great country. However, again I'm not really convinced that this bill offers the best approach to the issue, and perhaps this is a case where things should not be done, again, from the top down. I am not sure that the Alberta Economic Development Authority or Alberta Economic Development need to administer a system as proposed by this bill. More often than not, local issues are best solved, I believe, at the local level. Where municipalities see the need to work together for mutual benefit and for the benefit of their region, I think they will do what is necessary to create those ties. In fact, this is what is happening across Alberta.

So, Mr. Speaker, while I support the concept of communities working together towards a common economic development objective – and I think all members support the communities of their respective constituencies – I find it difficult to support this particular bill as it's structured, and I don't think it's the best way to accomplish the goal.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

We'll move now to hear from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, please.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I had been trying to organize my thoughts in preparation for speaking to Bill 217, and when I was listening to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod, he got me going on thinking about regional planning commissions. I join with him in a lament for the loss of regional planning commissions representing at least part of the largest single unicity in the whole nation of Canada. I'm always struck by what a tragic loss that is in terms of having lost the regional planning commission.

I see some quizzical looks. There may be members who don't realize that the city of Calgary is the largest city with a single government. There are larger cities in Canada, but there is no other city in Canada with a larger population governed by a single council. We have some representatives, the Member for Calgary-Cross and some of the other constituencies, who know that far better than I do.

Anyway, I got excited because I thought somewhere in Bill 217 something that I might have missed was a promise to bring back regional planning commissions. But I see that's not the case, and that'll have to be the subject, I guess, for another private member's bill.

My approach to this, Mr. Speaker, is to go back to two years ago, I think it was, when the mayor of the city of Calgary invited me to go to a Prosperity South meeting in Drumheller. We've heard something about Prosperity South, and I was enormously impressed to see representatives of virtually every municipality in southern Alberta come together. And you know what was impressive about this? There was no secretariat; there was no big-budget operation of functionaries and that sort of thing. Mainly what you had were elected representatives from this host of communities in southern Alberta coming together, not because of some legal mandate but because they had things they wanted to share and they appreciated a common interest in developing economic growth in Pincher Creek, in Taber, in Calgary, and every place in between.

When I look at Bill 217, I'm sort of struck by the contrast. Prosperity South has the energy. It's driven by communities that want to see change and see a higher level of economic co-operation, and there's actually a lot of dynamism at those Prosperity South meetings. Then I look at Bill 217, which is a bit of an empty

structure without a plan, so I guess I'm wondering how it is that one can sort of enable the other. I'd like to be able to take the kind of energy and the breadth of perspective that I see in a Prosperity South forum, but I'd like to see it better supported. I think that's what the Member for Livingstone-Macleod was getting at as well.

To any members that haven't had the benefit of finding out more about this organization, I think it's pretty exciting, and it's always terrific to see people working hard for goals that are bigger than their own municipal boundaries or that go outside their municipal boundaries.

Does Bill 217 facilitate that? Does Bill 217 strengthen and augment what those municipal representatives are attempting to do through Prosperity South? Well, I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker. In fact, when I look through it, my concern is that it would be perhaps not nearly as impactful or effective or helpful as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and her caucus colleagues sitting down and saying to Prosperity South – and there may be such a thing in northern Alberta. I haven't heard anybody mention it. There may be an equivalent, a counterpart to Prosperity South in other parts of Alberta, and I'm just not aware of it. But is there not some way to provide some additional support through the Department of Municipal Affairs or perhaps some other government department? As I understand it, the city of Calgary picks up a lot of the logistical effort and some of the cost and some of the secretarial support, secretariat kind of support and so on. You know, that's something that really should be supported by the Department of Municipal Affairs. Maybe that is the best way for the province of Alberta to assist that kind of energy.

In my discussions with my colleague from Lethbridge-East, we were talking about the size of Prosperity South. It may be that it's a bit cumbersome because it includes so many different elected units, and maybe there's some merit in reducing the size of it or a bit of a modest subdivision. That seems to be something that certainly warrants attention. But I think at the end of the day what I'm left with is thinking about a modest level of support in terms of resources from the provincial government to organizations like Prosperity South. If there isn't a counterpart in northern Alberta, for Pete's sake, let's get the mayors of Peace River and Edmonton and Fort McMurray and invite them to go to one of those meetings and see what's going on. I see the former mayor of Wood Buffalo-Fort McMurray is here, and maybe he is fully aware of Prosperity South. He may know of that very effective initiative in the other half of the province. It may be that that model could be taken and replicated in northern Alberta. I know there's activity with the far north communities, but I'm not sure that includes, in terms of regional co-operation, the city of Edmonton and Leduc and some of those communities that are a little further south.

5:00

In any event, as I look at the bill, I think that may be the path that holds out most promise to achieve what the sponsor of this bill indicated he wants to achieve. What we don't need is more bureaucracy. I see my friend from Cypress-Medicine Hat, who is always taking great pains to remind every one of us that the last thing Albertans want to see and need is more bureaucracy.

MR. SMITH: We don't take pains.

MR. DICKSON: The Minister of Labour, I think supports that initiative as well.

So what we want to see is: how do we take some of that Alberta ingenuity, that Alberta creativity, how do we create some collaborative processes that don't involve a lot of extra infrastructure and

administrative cost and administrative overhead and just harness that energy and ensure that it's able to achieve the kinds of goals and objectives that are doable and that all of these communities in different parts of Alberta want to see? You know, it may be that the Department of Economic Development would be a source, as well as Municipal Affairs, that could provide some of that financial support to things like Prosperity South.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, not to belabour the point, I'd suggest that the mover of the bill, who I'm sure is exceedingly well-intentioned, should sit down and talk with some of the people who have extensive experience with the Prosperity South initiative, and when they tell him, "What we need to be able to further our activities in Prosperity South is some administrative support, some secretarial support, that sort of thing," I hope he'll champion those issues in his caucus and with the cabinet ministers, because that may achieve the very objective he told us about in introducing Bill 217, and it may do it without an additional layer of administration, an additional layer of bureaucracy.

The mover of the bill has often given me advice. In fact we sit on the FOIP select special committee, and often that member has whispered a few words of encouragement to me in terms of trying to cut down on the cost of bureaucracy. That's why I was a bit surprised. I thought it was maybe a typo on the face, that perhaps we had the wrong member associated with this bill initiative, because of all members, I could not believe that my friend from . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Athabasca-Wabasca.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you. I could not believe that my friend from that part of the province, Mr. Speaker . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, that part of the province.

MR. DICKSON: . . . with a well-earned and well-entrenched reputation . . . I'm not going to say it now, Mr. Speaker, because it would look foolish. It would be an admission that I didn't know that that member represented Athabasca, and of course I knew that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm just trying to finish, but I guess I'm trying to be as helpful to the Member from Athabasca-Wabasca as he has been to me in various committee meetings and just encourage him that there's a way he can take his goal with Bill 217 and actually achieve some very positive results to the same effect. I wish him well in that process, and I'm sure every one of the other 82 members of this Chamber is happy to work with him and support initiatives to get those communities working co-operatively for shared prosperity throughout the province.

Those are my comments, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to enter into debate on Bill 217 and talk about the intent, purpose, and potential of this act.

Mr. Speaker, firstly, I can only pass nothing but congratulatory remarks to the member for bringing this initiative forward, because it says one thing: he knows the value of work; he knows the value of development; he knows what happens when an area is populated, where unemployment can be as high 27 percent. Through a lot of the fundamental works that he's brought through himself, he's been able to bring this down to 9 and 10 percent, because he knows that

the fundamental part of the Canadian value equation is the ability to get a good day's pay for a good day's work. This member, who I feel privileged to serve with, is able to do that by continually concentrating on economic development. As Kennedy once said, "A rising tide lifts all the boats." He's indeed doing his effort to lift the tides in Athabasca-Wabasca.

So you start to see these kinds of initiatives, Mr. Speaker. You see them in a project that I worked with the member on called the Native Venture Capital Co. Ltd. In that venture a number of companies who were working up there put funds together and started to sponsor companies that would grow from a small nurturing area to larger northern industry type companies.

What he did, Mr. Speaker, is he realized the value of the labour input. We were able to take that company and move those funds, not into business start-up but into scholarships, into scholarships that allowed people in the member's constituency to go to school, get value-added education, become more productive, deliver more gross domestic product per day than before. It was because of the private sector being put together with an achievable deliverable through the good efforts of a government member.

What that means is that we don't have to spend money on economic development, Mr. Speaker. We have to find ways that move the issues forward, move development in specific constituencies, and there's no member that I've seen better represent his constituency and have his eyes on the prize of development, of employment, of people working in a productive fashion. For that, I only continue to salute him, not only for his prior initiatives but for, of course, what you see being brought forward today.

Let me just talk for a couple of minutes about my privilege to work with the EDA and the time I spent as Minister of Economic Development. This is a very strong organization, Mr. Speaker, but it's also a very cheap organization with respect to what the government pays for its involvement and its work with the government of Alberta. It provides a very open, candid, and rapid dialogue for important business issues. They've delivered strong results: the machinery and equipment taxation initiative, the oil sands initiative, the generic royalty, the growth of fence-line industries, the reduction in aviation gas to prevent tankering in this province. The change in the rail gas initiative, I believe, is also very typical.

So what it does is create dialogue, action, results, and it does it quickly, and it does it without formal structure. I think that's its real strength. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the marketplace functions like that as well. Give it the framework of regulations that it needs to succeed, and it will succeed. It is the most competitive method of allocating scarce resources known to man. It's been proven over and over and over again. If something works, let's let it work. Let's not get in there and meddle with this guy. Let's just let it work its magic with the invisible hand of competition. We know that works. We know it's been effective and we're going to continue to support it.

5:10

The member himself, through his many initiatives, has supported the ability for Alberta to create the environment for a competitive marketplace to occur. The results are tremendous, particularly in his constituency, where you've seen the largest amounts of growth probably in employment and a shrinking unemployment line over the last five years.

I've always felt, Mr. Speaker, that the theory of regional development is something that's cost taxpayers in Canada well over hundreds of billions of dollars over the last 30 years. Whether it's a vision to the north, whether it's regional development of the

Maritimes, whether it's a just society, call it what you will. I once took a course where you evaluated mergers and acquisitions, and they said, "If the chief executive officer ever uses the word vision in justifying why he made that acquisition, run away, because it will be failure."

What you've seen in Canada is we put money into regional development, and we decided to put square pegs into round holes. There's a reason why industries fail. There's a reason why there's a rust belt. There's a reason why there's growth in the sun belt. There's a reason why the knowledge-based economies are emerging, Mr. Speaker. It's not because we put taxpayers' money in isolated areas or that we take people and say: "Don't worry. We'll train you and everything. We'll move in this large bureaucracy à la Liberal Ottawa, and we'll be able to generate jobs and employment." It doesn't work. What works again and again is education: educating your workforce, providing a competitive environment, knowing that the marketplace works.

DR. WEST: Education. Competitive. Marketplace.

MR. SMITH: Noting that the Minister of Energy is prepared to help you at a moment's notice with kind comments. I swear there's a parrot in here.

Mr. Speaker there's no question in my mind about the value of the marketplace, the value of individual initiative, and the ability for this government simply to have the privilege of presiding over some of the largest growth figures in the history of the dominion in a competitive marketplace with minimal government involvement and maximum government compassion for its constituents. That's what I think this member has brought forward today.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak on Bill 217 and add my comments. I'm of two minds on this particular bill. I'm sure that the member introducing the bill is very, very, sincere in trying to get further input from areas outside of the large urban centres. However, I have to look at the track record of this government and say to myself: "If Bill 217 did become law, would there be a serious intent for the government to follow through on it? Does the government really want citizen participation? Does the government go out of its way to encourage citizen participation? Does the government delegate authority decision-making to other bodies? Is it prepared to take the advice of other bodies?" That's where I have my difficulties.

If this government was truly, truly, committed to citizen participation, getting input from Albertans, we wouldn't be sitting in this House today debating Bill 37 because the government would be out there doing the right thing and getting the input. I'm drawing a comparison, Mr. Minister. The government would be out there getting input from Albertans as to how they feel on that particular one. If the government really believed in delegating authority, the government would heed the requests of the various municipalities throughout Alberta who have consistently asked for more decision-making authority. They are treated like a little brother to big government and big government kind of keeps them under their arm like, "You're our little children."

Municipalities have made it very, very, clear that they would like broader authority. They would like more opportunity to input the provincial government. They would want to work as a partnership. But, no, the provincial government hasn't done that. The provincial government hasn't allowed that opportunity to occur. So what

would lead us to believe, even if the concept of the regional economic development councils was established, that they would be productive in the sense that the government would listen to them, respect their advice, and follow through? Or would they just be token bodies there for show? That's my fear, that there would be token bodies there for show.

There are alternatives there at the present time that members have already spoken on. If we want to get some type of united or co-ordinated bodies, the regional planning boards that were there for years and years that were dismantled - one has to question why. Weren't they a viable body to bring municipalities together? Were they not? But they were, for whatever reason, disbanded. We see some municipalities that have collectively gotten together, and they do discuss problems of similar regional concerns, whether it be economic development, whether it be transportation. So that alternative is there as well. But if they do go through all that effort and come forward with recommendations and if the government simply tosses those recommendations out the door, it's meaningless. So we have to look at those alternatives that are presently there. The member himself, of course, is chairman of a body. What's it called? The Northern . . .

MRS. NELSON: The Northern Alberta Development Council.

MR. WICKMAN: Exactly. And there's an opportunity to develop economic happenings throughout the province that possibly aren't being utilized to the full extent at the present time. So while I commend the member for bringing forward a bill with some good intent, if that member were given the opportunity to act upon that bill in isolation, possibly some good would come out of it. However, even if it does go through the second reading stage into committee and is approved, is it a meaningless piece of legislation that sets up councils that simply aren't given the respect of government, as we see happening with municipal councils at the present time?

So the bottom line is, because of a lack of trust that I have in the goodwill of this government, as viable as this may seem, I hesitate to support it. I'm not convinced that the government would follow through and make those councils into productive, meaningful bodies that would in fact do some good rather than just be another level of bureaucracy that would not serve any valuable purpose.

On that point I'll conclude.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move adjournment of debate on Bill 217.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has moved adjournment of debate on Bill 217. Having heard the motion by the hon. member, does the Assembly concur with that motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Those opposed? That is carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I move that we call it 5:30 and that we reconvene in the House at 8 o'clock this evening in Committee of the Whole.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you. Does the Assembly concur with the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Those opposed? That is carried. The Assembly shall stand adjourned until 8 p.m. at which time we will reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:19 p.m.]

