

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 25, 1998 1:30 p.m.**

Date: 98/11/25

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Let us pray.

O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people.

We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a very special visitor to our province. Seated in your gallery is Her Excellency June Clarke, high commissioner for Barbados. This is Her Excellency's first official visit since her appointment in 1995, and I ask that Her Excellency rise and receive the customary warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have an excellent petition here signed by residents of Alberta asking the government to amend the Legislative Assembly Act to make it mandatory that there be two sittings of the Legislature each year, the spring and the fall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions today, the first, signed by 20 residents of Alberta, is petitioning the Legislative Assembly to

urge the Government of Alberta to maintain the operating allowance for day care centres at the 1997 level until a comprehensive public review of the funding is completed.

The second petition is signed by over 800 residents of Alberta calling on Alberta to "acknowledge the importance of quality child care to our families and children," "acknowledge the fact that Quality Child Care is more costly than care provided by centres [that subscribe] only to minimum provincial licensing standards," and petitions

the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce and support legislation requiring and enabling the Regional Authorities responsible for Services for Children and Families to make Quality Child Care accessible and affordable for all Alberta Families.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm presenting a petition signed by 123 Calgaryans urging Alberta's adoption of the convention on the rights of the child.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented on Bill 37 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.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I presented earlier this session be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned citizens of Alberta, petition the Alberta Legislative Assembly to consult with Albertans on the problems with the current CPP, and to discuss alternatives.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm requesting leave now to have the two petitions that had been introduced the other day read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

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

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

head: Statement by the Speaker

Tabling Documents

THE SPEAKER: Prior to recognizing hon. members, the chair would like to make a brief statement at this point in the proceedings about tablings.

As members may know, the practice of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta is to allow members great leeway with respect to tabling documents. This practice places an obligation on members to act responsibly to ensure that the time of the House is not taken up unnecessarily on tablings and that those tablings conform with the practices of the House.

It has come to the chair's attention that last Wednesday, November 18, 1998, photocopies of 500 postcards on Bill 19 were tabled in the Assembly, which would be Sessional Paper 824/98. The next day it appears that photocopies of the same 500 postcards were tabled as Sessional Paper 847/98.

The chair would like to reiterate the comments made by the Deputy Speaker on August 20, 1996, that with respect to duplicate tablings, clearly this cannot be allowed to continue. Members must police themselves and be responsible for their actions.

The chair also notes that public documents such as excerpts from *Hansard* or statutes of Alberta should not be tabled. The consequences of unnecessary tablings were referred to by the Speaker on April 11, 1995, when he said:

The Chair wishes to avoid a situation where either the volume of tablings or the time spent in the Chamber on tablings becomes

such that tablings have to be done through the Clerk's office, as is the case in some jurisdictions.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly four copies of the 1997-98 annual report of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table five copies of the final report from our housing symposium held in June. We will use the contents of this report in developing housing policy in our consultation with Albertans.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings. One is 100 cards that were presented to me at the event that I attended in Calgary marking the UN convention on the rights of the child.

I also want to table five copies of the UN convention on the rights of the child. This convention, Mr. Speaker, has been endorsed by 187 countries, including every province in our country except Alberta.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table this afternoon five copies of a letter dated February 19, 1993, from the Department of Labour indicating that on only a few rare occasions has any mill inspected by the Alberta Research Council "achieved a grade of 7% or less" regarding the inspection of untreated pine shakes.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today: two documents from the Department of Economic Development concerning West Edmonton Mall and five copies of 500 unique postcards concerning Bill 219.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to table five copies of a very detailed report describing why funding for the early intervention program should be increased to ease the massive waiting list in Edmonton. Last year 465 children were turned away from the Capital health early intervention program. This report provides and offers to government a better alternative for addressing the needs of children with disabilities.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings. The first one is the list of agencies who participated in the National Child Day event in Calgary last Friday.

The second tabling is 202 signatures and messages from Albertans who gathered at the candlelight vigil in Calgary on Friday, November 20 in support of National Child Day in Canada.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly the First Stepz parent council of the Capital health authority early intervention program including parents who are working very hard for the cause of their children who have developmental disabilities and for future children with these disabilities in our province. The purpose of the early intervention program is early remediation of a child's developmental delay. Many of our members in this House will have met or heard from this dedicated group and received a copy of the report, which was tabled earlier by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. I'd also like to thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora for the courtesy of allowing me the opportunity to introduce these people to the House. Six members of the parent council who had the opportunity to meet earlier and bring their concerns to the Minister of Health are Mrs. Michelle Black, Mrs. Jackie Beatty, Mrs. Kim Gleason, Mrs. Carmen Leung, Mr. Angus Clyburn, and Mrs. Kelly Baldock. With them are 31 parents plus two very special children, Chad Mackenzie and Alexander Murray. I'd ask them all to rise and please receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House 125 students from the very, very progressive Bisset school in my riding. They are accompanied by their teachers, Deb Myroniuk, Mark Edwards, Gerry Middlestadt, Brenda Giourmetakis, and my good friend, Dorothy Feuchter, who helps run Thomas' Fisherman's Grotto restaurant in my area, and parent helpers Linda Hogstead, Linda Kaps, and Janice Karingten. They are all here to observe proceedings of this House. These young people do truly represent our greatest national resource, and I'm going to ask them all to rise and get an exceptionally warm welcome from all members here.

Thank you.

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a very special young student by the name of Leigh Gendron. Leigh is a student in Edmonton, and he excels particularly in mathematics and science. He's a 14-year-old student in grade 10. I had a brief meeting with him. He told me that on his last math test he got 100 percent, and on his last science 10 test he got something like 92 or 93 percent. Leigh wants to be an astronaut when he grows up, and I'm encouraging him in a career in science and technology. Let's welcome Leigh and his mother, Melanie Moore, to this Assembly and encourage Leigh in his progress in science and technology studies.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 60 students from Meyonohk elementary school in Edmonton-Mill Woods, their teachers, Mrs. Arlene Fearon and Mr. John Murphy; and parent helpers Mrs. Cathy Moore, Mr. Michael Killam, and Mr. Kurt Ellis. I believe they're in the gallery, but if not they'll be joining us. I would ask that they receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you two outstanding dynamic individuals from Lacombe who try desperately to keep their MLA on track. Lori Hellofs and Cheryl Christie efficiently and effectively run my constituency office. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Gary Iley, who's the chief executive officer for Children's Foundation for Health and Education. He's also very involved with the early intervention program. I'd ask him to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a lady who makes my job and my life very, very easy out of the constituency office located in Fort Macleod. She serves the constituents of Livingstone-Macleod in a very exceptional way. I'm not sure I make her life so easy. I'd like to introduce in the members' gallery Pam Young from Fort Macleod. Welcome, Pam. I'd ask the members to give the traditional warm welcome.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly two people that work very hard at a very arduous task in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder. They are charged with the duty of making me look good, which is darn difficult. [interjections] As difficult as it is, with my permission they took a half a day off from that arduous task to come and see what actually does occur in this Chamber. So please be the best you can to this member today. I'd like to have my assistants, Rhonda Middlestead and Denise Chapman, rise in the gallery and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Health Care System

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the Premier decided that what was needed was a health summit. Then on Monday he said no, he wouldn't pull Bill 37. Then on Tuesday he pulled Bill 37. Then he decided that what's needed is a blue-ribbon panel. My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier have any plans for what he's doing in health care? Albertans feel it is their business to ask.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we have lots of plans relative to health care. We started with those plans back in 1993, when we picked up on some work that was started by the then Minister of Health in the former Getty government but was never completed -- it was never completed -- to reorganize health boards, to reorganize those boards from some 200 separate boards in the province to some 17 regional health authorities, to establish

health councils, to challenge the system to find better and more effective and efficient ways of doing things, to dramatically reduce costs but not reduce the level of service, and then to look carefully at where we needed to reinvest and make the appropriate dollars available to reinvest to address the pressure points in health. But there's still more work to be done.

Bill 37 was part of that work, and I'm so happy today to see that the hon. leader of the Liberal Party now acknowledges that legislation is needed. I'll quote from her news scrum: there are some issues where the College of Physicians and Surgeons feels abandoned by the government by not having legislation they can use to stop private, for-profit hospitals; the government needs to address that. Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what we were trying to address through Bill 37, and that's what they were opposing.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, they certainly need help. That's for sure.

Given the list: regional health authorities, summits, panels, committees, the College of Physicians and Surgeons -- this government keeps trying to pass off responsibility for decision-making in health care to others. When will they take responsibility for the mess that they've created in health care in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we want to hear from Albertans, and the Liberals want to hear from Albertans, too. As a matter of fact they were proposing a traveling road show that undoubtedly would have been politically motivated. We're proposing a health summit to hear from good-thinking people as to how we address the long-term needs of health.

We have a good document that has been tabled, Mr. Speaker. It was prepared by the MLA for Calgary-Bow and her committee. It's a good report; it's a good starting point for the future. We have done a tremendous amount in the past, a tremendous amount. We have led the country in terms of meeting the challenges of delivering health care in an effective and efficient manner. There is still more work to be done.

Mr. Speaker, one of the fundamental questions that needs to be asked -- and maybe the Liberals need to ask this question, or perhaps they already have the answer: how much is enough? How much is enough? Do we spend the total provincial budget on health care? How much is enough? We would like to hear from health care providers, and we would like to hear from Albertans. How much is enough? What is the right amount to put in place to make sure that we deliver effective and efficient health care services at a price we can all afford?

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, when's this Premier going to admit that his real dilemma with Bill 37 isn't a communications problem; it's a credibility problem?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, it was a credibility problem, and because we did not as a government spend thousands and thousands of dollars, as did those people who were opposed to the bill, to run paid advertisements, to run four-page spreadsheets in the newspapers, to run ads about every half hour saying -- and the misinformation being spread by the Liberal opposition, yes, created a credibility problem. We were trying to do what was right, and every step of the way these people were out there with their cohorts spreading totally false information relative to this bill.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier claims that all of the documents regarding the government's involvement in the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall have been sent to the Auditor General. Why are there no documents within the Ministry of Economic Development regarding the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, everything that was in my office relative to my involvement at that particular time with respect to West Edmonton Mall has been turned over to the Auditor General.

With respect to what might or might not be in the Department of Economic Development, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Economic Development and my office have co-operated fully with the Auditor General in providing him with full access, open access to all information and all documents within our domain.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, that's interesting, Mr. Speaker. How does the Premier explain, then, the existence of these documents tabled today that the Ministry of Economic Development said didn't exist three months ago?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I haven't seen the documents to which the hon. leader alludes. If she would send them over, I'll have a look at them.

AN HON. MEMBER: We did. We tabled them.

MR. KLEIN: Well, I don't have them yet. You know, if they would have the courtesy of sending them over and saying: look; we're going to table this today -- I mean, we do that. When we give ministerial statements and so on, we give an hour or so warning. So there are some basic, fundamental courtesies, which, by the way, when that member was in government, were demanded of the opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, how can the Auditor General possibly -- possibly -- do his job if documents signed by ministers of the Crown have apparently gone missing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea whether this has been sent over or not. They are letters to the Hon. Ken Kowalski, Deputy Premier and minister of tourism. I don't know if these have been sent over or not. They were not documents in my office. But I'll tell you what: if they haven't, they will be. Okay?

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today the Alberta Treasury Branch announced that it is preparing for a \$45 million loss as a result of the Premier's 1994 directive to meddle in the Alberta Treasury Branch's refinancing of West Edmonton Mall. My questions are to the Premier. Is the \$45 million potential loss to taxpayers the made-in-Alberta solution you refer to in your February 22, 1994, memo?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, it is there only as a notation. As a notation. It hasn't been recorded in any way, shape, or form as a loss. It hasn't been written down.

I'll have the hon. Treasurer supplement.

MR. DAY: The Premier is a hundred percent correct. The mall being appraised, as I understand it, by ATB -- and there's a number of appraisals that have taken place on the mall -- came in a certain appraisal figure, and then to show proper and responsible accounting, as they do and as they continue to do, a contingency is taken because of a difference in opinion in terms of the appraisal of the mall. It is not in any way, shape or form a write-off. It's a contingency. This is an accounting matter, and it's very appropriate and responsible accounting that ATB accountants have properly said that in case or should it ever happen that in fact this discrepancy becomes a reality, they have placed a contingency on their books for it. It is normal and appropriate and responsible accounting.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Premier, when will you admit to being the mall's \$400 million man and tell Albertans when exactly cabinet approved the loan guarantee to West Edmonton Mall?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, cabinet did not approve the loan guarantee to West Edmonton Mall. That was a deal between ATB and the Toronto-Dominion Bank, as I understand it, and West Edmonton Mall.

Mr. Speaker, all of the information that sent over was either contained in the court documents . . . [interjections] This information was contained in the court documents, and it could very well be in the hands of the Auditor General. I would suspect that the Auditor General has boxes full of material on this particular issue.

It was this Treasurer, who, when he found out about the side deals, immediately called on the Auditor General to look into this. We went a step further, and we said: if there are any allegations of improper political involvement in this particular matter, that too will be referred to the Auditor General. I've given a statutory declaration. I've turned over everything that I have in my office -- it wasn't a lot -- to the Auditor General. I assume that other ministers and former ministers involved with this situation have also turned over information.

I understand that the Auditor General will be reporting soon. I would just ask that the hon. member have some patience. After all the Auditor General is an officer of the Legislative Assembly. He was appointed with the support of the Liberal Party. If they do not have confidence in the Auditor General, please stand up and say so now.

MR. SAPERS: There is indeed a lack of confidence at stake here, Mr. Speaker. Given the lack of confidence that Albertans have that the Premier has in fact turned over all the documents, given the lack of confidence that Albertans have in the fact that the Treasurer won't tell Albertans what the Auditor General has been asked to do, will the Premier please just forestall all of that, get it out in the open, call a public inquiry, get documents subpoenaed, get witnesses under oath right now?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, basically without saying so much, this hon. member has suggested that I am lying to the people of Alberta. Will he step outside the House and reiterate it and show the courage of his convictions and call me a liar? I'll tell you what: he will get the inquiry he wants. Big time.

MR. DAY: Supplemental information relative to the Liberal request for the inquiry. There should be some things noted clearly for the record here. First of all, Mr. Speaker, all documents, every drawer, every door, are open to the Auditor General. It should also be noted very clearly that elements of this matter are before the courts, but the things that the Auditor General is looking at relative to political interference are not

before the courts. At the Premier's request and at my request, those elements are being expedited. Make no mistake. It should be very clear that as the criminal elements and the civil charges are before the courts, we will, possibly every day and definitely every week, be getting questions about that in the Legislature. That is a given.

2:00

The other thing that is very interesting to note. Mr. Speaker, when the Auditor General does, very soon, file his observations related to if there has been political interference, if the Auditor General condemns this government -- and that is his right to do -- for interference, the Liberals will say: that was a good report, Mr. Auditor General. If the Auditor General says that there was no undue political interference, they will condemn the report. Writers can write their stories on that now. That will be their response.

Mr. Speaker, the final element relative to the inquiry. The Liberals continue to change their position relative to ATB. One day they say: sell it. One day they say: do an IPO. The next day they do status quo. I have here a letter from the finance critic of the Liberals. Now, today he's asking for a public inquiry. But several weeks ago I get a letter from him, and he said that he would suggest that the expense of a public inquiry could be avoided if the government made all of the information available. [interjections] All of the information, therefore, has been handed over to the Auditor General. [interjections] Nancy don't get too riled up; just listen to this. This is very interesting. He goes on to say, "Should any evidence of political involvement or interference be established," then have a full public inquiry. This is his letter to me . . . [interjections] They sure get upset, Mr. Speaker. He is saying that after the Auditor General's report, if there's an indictment of the government, then have a public inquiry. Today he's saying: have a public inquiry now.

For security purposes, Mr. Speaker, I need to say one more thing. I have carefully compared the signatures on this paper with others that the member has filed. It appears to me that this signature is quite different from the ones he usually signs. I'm just saying that as a security measure, you might want to be careful. It may be his, but it looks distinctly different than other signatures on information from him.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, correspondence dated October through December 1996 filed recently with the court, correspondence that was between Treasury Branches and West Edmonton Mall just months before the February 1997 election call, show that the Alberta Treasury Branches threatened "serious consequences" against the Ghermezian family if they released information about their secret agreement with West Edmonton Mall, which they were attempting to do because they believed that Treasury Branches was going to make a move on them. My question to the Premier is this: who within the government ordered the Treasury Branches and through them West Edmonton Mall to not make the secret financing agreement public until after the 1997 provincial election?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. Provincial Treasurer supplement, but when we found out about that document, that's precisely the time that we called in the Auditor General. It was for that reason precisely that we called in the Auditor General. We said: this is highly unusual.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, there's been so much correspondence back and forth, but I can tell you that what the Premier has said

is accurate. When we finally had a document -- because things that the member has said had been flying around and construed and interpreted different ways, and we finally had in our possession, released from the mall, a document which seemed to indicate political interference. It was the culmination of all this type of correspondence, activity, and here it was suggesting that. We realized that this is absolutely unheard of; this absolutely did not take place. Once we had that from West Edmonton Mall suggesting that there'd been that level of political interference, the Auditor General was called in. We said: this is inappropriate, and we need to hear from the Auditor General and have him look at the entire file.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about 1996 documents, just months before the provincial election was called.

Well, then, to the Treasurer: how does he or the Premier expect Albertans to believe that Alberta Treasury Branch officials would be so sensitive to the political fallout of disclosing the mall sweetheart refinancing deal when the only people who would be hurt by the fallout would be members of this government?

MR. DAY: I think I've just answered, and we've shown the response from this government, Mr. Speaker. When we became acutely aware that these types of things were being said, that there'd been that type of involvement, we needed a clearing of the air, and that's why the Auditor General was called in. It was the culmination of all of this type of nuance and correspondence and everything else, and the Auditor General was called in. It was the government that called in the Auditor General. The Liberals missed it. Now, if Gene Zwodesky had been the critic at the time, I think he would have caught it, but we caught it.

MS BARRETT: On the subject of clearing the air, now that the Provincial Treasurer has raised that aspect, how does the Premier expect Albertans to believe that the Ghermezians didn't agree to keep those secret financial deals away from the public view because they felt beholden to their political friends who arranged the refinancing? Isn't that the case?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, although a lot of this is now before the courts and before the Auditor General, I will respond and recount to the best of my knowledge, because it was quite recent. It was only a few months ago when the Provincial Treasurer phoned me at home and said: lookit; we have got a problem here. Apparently the ATB wanted to sell this paper when the lawyers for West Edmonton Mall produced a document, a side agreement. That's when the Provincial Treasurer reported to me. He said: I find this very unusual, especially the bottom line, where it suggested that perhaps nothing be said about this until after the 1997 provincial election. That's when this Provincial Treasurer on behalf of this government said that there is something wrong here and I want it investigated.

You know, the Liberals picked up on it. What they did is they recycled a memo that was published in a book some 18 months earlier by Monier Rahall, *Banksters and Prairie Boys*, and said: well, what about this? That was the . . .

THE SPEAKER: I would like refer the members on both sides of this Assembly to *Beauchesne* 484.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Canada Pension Plan Reform

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canada pension plan is an issue that is important to all Albertans. Recently there has been a lot of talk about this country's CPP crisis. It is my understanding that the Provincial Treasurer has taken a lead role in dealing with the federal government with regards to CPP reform. My question is to the Provincial Treasurer. What is Alberta's position on CPP reform?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of concern from the citizens of Alberta about how the federal government has suggested that the problems and difficulties with the CPP be corrected. We have certainly heard from them. We have concerns. We have concerns related to the transfer of the cost of the CPP debt to younger Canadians, and we are very concerned about the higher contribution levels. We know that the plan has to be actuarially sound, but that higher contribution level is going to take a significant chunk out of people's hard-earned dollars.

I've presented to finance ministers and territorial ministers and to the federal minister a paper that points to Alberta's concerns but also shows the areas that we believe need to be looked into. We think there are some solutions to the problem, and we have tabled those. There's also the issue of governance of the plan itself. The plan managers should be under the same prudent investment guidelines that other plan managers are under. It should be independent; it should be arm's length. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I've also shared some concern with the federal minister related to the chief actuary no longer having his position because of a discrepancy in numbers there. So we've got that on the table, and we've made the Alberta position clear on all of these issues.

MR. HLADY: Well, my first supplemental to the same minister: what has happened since Alberta presented its position to the finance ministers in June?

MR. DAY: Well, in fact that was done in June. I tabled the Alberta position. I asked for concurrence among other finance ministers and the territorial leaders and the federal minister that a working group be put together to immediately start to look at the Alberta position and look at some of the solutions. I reconfirmed in a meeting with the federal deputy of Finance in August that in fact a working committee was up and going and doing their work, and in a subsequent discussion and correspondence to the federal minister about a month ago, again related to the chief actuary no longer working on that particular file, I wanted the assurance that that wasn't going to slow down the working group that was already digging into the Alberta position. I had the assurance that the work was continuing to go ahead, and I am hopeful that early in the new year we'll get some reflection back from that working committee in terms of progress. At some point we will assess what the Alberta position will be: are they moving ahead with our suggestions, are they not, and where do we go from there?

2:10

MR. HLADY: To the same minister: if this commitment isn't forthcoming, would Alberta consider a different option; for instance, the Chilean approach to pension reform, which allowed individuals to move out of their pension to a mandatory RRRSP program?

MR. DAY: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the example in Chile is one

that has been looked at by governments around the world. They have a model that has been quite effective. It also has some deficiencies. It has some high administration costs. There have been some concerns with how it is administered. Chile is one example of a fund which appears at least to be actuarially sound and appears to offer to workers some hope of a decent retirement when they retire. We've looked at that model. We've also looked at others. As I said, there are some deficiencies with that particular one.

I can't honestly say that there is a plan in place. If in fact the federal and provincial committee says, "We don't want to entertain any of these initiatives that Alberta's proposing," I can't say right now that I have a plan in place that says that immediately we will do this or do that. We will have to contemplate the situation at this time. I've been getting some decent reaction back from the working committee that we may be able to make progress on some of Alberta's positions, so I'm hoping it won't come to that. We'll wait and see.

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

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The UN convention on the rights of the child provides that a child has a right to the highest standard of health and medical care attainable. This government annually turns away 30 percent of disabled children, makes children wait up to a year for mental health services, and restricts the Children's Advocate to monitoring only children in care. My questions are to the Premier. What is so wrong with recognizing the rights of children?

MR. KLEIN: Well, we do recognize the rights of the children. Mr. Speaker, they don't listen. The then minister for, I think, federal and intergovernmental affairs at that particular time, Mr. Horsman, wrote the federal government and said that we would be willing participants, willing signatories to the declaration if the feds would put on a notation relative to two articles. [interjection] Well, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition knows because she was part of it, and she supported the government's position at that particular time.

MRS. MacBETH: You know full well that I didn't support it.

MR. KLEIN: She did support it at that particular time, Mr. Speaker, because I was there.

MRS. SLOAN: What's your position today?

MR. KLEIN: Our position is today as it was then. If the federal government will put a notation on the convention relative to parental rights to as much as possible keep their children from viewing vile material, pornography -- and if they support that, then come on and say so -- and the article that talks about assembly in order that their children, their charges are not associating with bad people, with criminals.

MRS. SLOAN: Given the Premier's claim this week that Alberta law conforms to the convention, can he explain, then, why a growing number of children in this province are waiting to receive intervention programs and cannot because of underfunding and extensive waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think we have a number of ministers involved with children's services, but I will take this question under notice because I think it's very important that this hon. member be given a thorough and complete answer about exactly what this government is doing for children and for the protection of children, and it's very significant indeed.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Premier, and with that report to me I would appreciate it if you could clarify the statement you made just earlier this week that children shouldn't associate with people who would influence them to do bad things. So why, then, is child welfare placing children with convicts and addicts in a single men's hostel in this city?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that to be true, but the hon. Minister of Justice and the Attorney General advises that he has some information on this particular issue which he would be delighted to share with the hon. member.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Premier and Mr. Speaker. This question was actually asked some days ago, and I have since been briefed on the matter. All legislation with respect to the placement of those children was adhered to. I understood that they were segregated from that particular population. The necessary guidance and counseling was also provided for those children. The difficulty was, I understand, that there were no other placements available for those particular children. Nevertheless, they did everything they could to ensure the safety and protection of those children in that particular setting, and they therefore complied with their obligation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Year 2000 Compliance

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are hearing much concern being expressed not only by doomsayers but also by very credible financial institutions regarding computers that are not 2000 compliant, also termed Y2K or computer glitch. Predictions include anything from complete power blackouts to collapse of the world economy. Alberta's Auditor General's 1997-98 report also expresses much concern regarding Alberta's state of readiness. My questions are all to the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. Could the minister tell this Assembly: what is the state of preparedness of this government, and can Albertans be assured that government services will continue if computers indeed do crash?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta has been very proactive on this issue. We in fact initiated a government plan back in 1996. The department of public works does have a cross-government year 2000 team that assists all departments on common issues such as vendor compliance. However, I'd like to stress that every individual government department is responsible for developing and implementing its own year 2000 plan. Every department has now reviewed their applications and systems and identified which critical areas should receive priority attention. A target date of March 31, 1999, has been established as the recommended time frame for government compliance, and we're well on our way to meeting that target date.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that takes care of government departments, but what about government's extended stakeholders such as the health authorities and municipalities?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, each department is responsible for their own extended stakeholders, their partners, and that area is also, I believe, well under control. The Department of Health has allocated some \$130 million to health authorities specifically targeted to deal with year 2000 compliance on medical equipment. As well, as I understand it, Alberta Education is working very closely with their education partners on the year 2000 compliance, and in addition Alberta disaster services, through Transportation and Utilities, is working closely with the private sector on consequence management issues.

2:20

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. My final question is: what is the state of preparedness of this province's electrical industry and financial institutions?

MR. WOLOSHYN: Mr. Speaker, as indicated by the Auditor General, our contingency planning is also another important component that's under way within government departments and with key stakeholder organizations. Each department, as part of its year 2000 contingency plan, has been requested to identify contingency plans should critical systems fail or malfunction on January 1 in the year 2000. As well -- and I think this should be of interest to the folks across the way -- a working group comprised of both private- and public-sector participants has been established by Alberta disaster services to analyze potential emergency consequences based on input from these sectors and to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to address these same consequences.

Mr. Speaker, to give you an indication of how widespread this is, I understand that Emergency Preparedness Canada, Transport Canada, National Defence, and other representatives have been invited to take part in this, as well as our local provincial utilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Slot Machines

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Prior to the October VLT plebiscites the Premier denied plans for a slot machine wave, yet in the period of time from 1997 to 1998 we saw slot machines in casinos increase from 667 to 2,287. One casino in Edmonton alone is now doubling to 400 slot machines, probably more than you would see at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. My question to the Premier: why did the Premier mislead Albertans on the escalating number of slot machines in the casinos?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no one was misled on this particular issue. Obviously, you know, the hon. member has been into the casinos because he's done the counts. So if they're there for all to see, I can't see how anyone has been misleading anyone. I would remind the hon. member that it was the Liberal opposition who kept saying: get those VLTs out of the bars, and put them into the casinos where they belong.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my second question, again to the

Premier: why has the Premier refused to cap the number of slot machines throughout the province?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it has never been an issue. The issue was always VLTs in bars and lounges. I don't get any cards and letters on this issue. Perhaps if the hon. member is getting some, he could send them over.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my last question, again to the Premier. Mr. Premier, tell me who's responsible for placing these slot machines in casinos: the Premier, the minister of lotteries, the gaming secretariat, or the gaming commission?

MR. KLEIN: The gaming commission, Mr. Speaker.

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

Seniors' Property Taxes

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, in my government committee work with seniors, such as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta or in my work as MLA for Calgary-West, many seniors are increasingly feeling the negative impacts of the Alberta advantage because they live on fixed incomes. Many seniors living in their own homes in older, established communities and in a city or town experiencing strong population growth, such as Calgary, cannot afford to pay the increased taxes on their property. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Which level or levels of government -- federal, provincial, or municipal -- has the responsibility to address this problem?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-West for the question. It is indeed a good question. It relates to what is happening on a North American basis. In fact, everywhere we have a seniors' population growing, we are coping with the societal implications which my hon. friend, the Community Development minister, will respond to.

Quite specifically on the taxation issue, throughout North America, assessors, courts, and governments moved to market value assessment. In this province they did it quite specifically because the municipalities of Calgary and Edmonton said that a move to market value would make assessments easier for people to understand.

We are responsible, in fact, for assessments and setting that policy at the provincial level, but at the local level taxation is a matter for the municipality. Municipalities, through the authority granted in the Municipal Government Act, have the ability to reduce the taxation, defer the taxation, and make other arrangements so that those seniors with fixed incomes, those people that are disadvantaged by the market value assessment process, do not have to experience tax increases, and there are some innovative things being done about that.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my first supplemental is to the minister of Municipal Affairs and to the Minister of Community Development, who is the minister responsible for seniors. Does this government or Municipal Affairs have any solutions or proposals to assist seniors in dealing with the rise in taxes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in the first instance, we are examining some of the proposals that are being looked at North America-

wide, some that have been suggested as good proposals. In this very city there is something that's being done that I think is highly complementary for seniors. In fact, the interest for any increase in taxes that might be attributable to market value can be deferred over a five-year period. It will not be charged, and the payment can be made by the seniors as they're able to do so. So it's one example of ways, in consultation with our department, that we're looking at things that can be done.

Other forms of relief perhaps the Minister of Community Development can comment on.

Speaker's Ruling Question to Two Ministers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member who raised the question, you can only raise the question to one minister at a time. You can't raise the question to two ministers at a time. If the hon. Minister of Community Development has something to supplement the answer given by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, we'll accept that for a short supplemental.

Seniors' Property Taxes (continued)

MRS. McCLELLAN: Certainly. Mr. Speaker, I would advise the member and all members who have seniors in their constituency, which I would suggest is everyone in this House -- and remember that 91 percent of seniors in this province live in their own homes or in rental accommodation. So this is a serious issue.

Aside from the areas that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs has pointed out, we do have a special needs program in this province, Mr. Speaker, that has proved to be very responsive to seniors. We urge seniors, particularly seniors of lower income who are faced with high property taxes, unexpected costs in that area, to apply to that program to see if there would be some relief there.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my second supplemental is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Community Development, if she wishes to supplement. As the population ages in the next 12 years, the number of seniors in Alberta will double. What is the government doing to cope with more seniors proportionately, assuming they, too, will have fixed incomes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, Municipal Affairs, through the past year of consultation, has been fully cognizant of its responsibility to house those most in need, from low-income seniors to the people that have special needs. We are working in consultation with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, over 500 delegates came to the housing symposium held in June. Thirty-six percent of those in attendance either represented or were in fact seniors. They provided many solutions that are released, in fact, in the report that I have submitted and tabled today. One of the things that we're currently reviewing is the lodge assistance program to see if we can find more ways to fund those lodge communities, those areas that management bodies are coping with in a better fashion. We're reviewing the self-contained program, and we're reviewing all aspects of our funding.

Today, speaking with the Senior Citizens Housing Association, I have committed on behalf of our government for even further review, particularly where other innovative, home-grown solutions are required.

In actual supplement to that, I would ask that the Minister of Community Development comment on the specific seniors' programs.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, very briefly, the hon. Member for Calgary-West is chairing a very important committee which has a task set out for them to look at the impact of the increasing aging population in our province, which is by natural aging but also, I might point out, by a large in-migration to this province. Two years running this province experienced the highest in-migration of seniors of any province in Canada, and we think that's great. Obviously seniors find this an excellent place to locate and to live.

2:30

However, we also know that there is an impact on government policies and programs. One of the areas that I have directed the committee to explore in the short-term is the issue of housing, and we are working very closely with the Minister of Municipal Affairs in that area. We are asking that committee to look at those areas and a few others in the short-term, six months, and bring a report back to us so we can respond as quickly as possible.

On the longer term, Mr. Speaker, they will be looking at a number of issues, working with a number of seniors across the province, including Mr. Neil Reimer from the city. So if any members want to consult someone here, they certainly could talk to him. That will culminate in a seniors' symposium in the fall of 1999, with a full final report to me in the year 2000.

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

Pine Shake Roofing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government and the untreated pine shake have more in common: every day there is more decay. My first question is to the Minister of Labour. Why did you tell this Assembly on Monday that a manufacturer's phone call informed you of rotting pine shakes last year, when seven years ago your department was informed that untreated pine shakes were an unacceptable building material in the Alberta Building Code? Why?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, what we said on Monday was entirely accurate, and we responded with the due dispatch that the department is noted for as a customer-focused department. We see no evidence to substantiate the facts of the member's question.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, at the hon. minister's convenience, tomorrow I will table documents contrary to that.

My second question is also to the minister: why did your department ignore this warning, costing 30,000 hardworking Alberta homeowners up to \$10,000 each in replacement and repair costs? Why?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, I think the details of *Hansard* and the answer Monday and the answer today are more than a complete answer to the member's question.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. My third question is also to the hon. minister. Why has the minister, if we're going to get to the bottom of this problem across the province, not returned phone calls from the pine shake consumer action group located in St. Albert? They have been promised a consultation with you, a second visit with you and your department officials, and you have not even returned their calls. Why not?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, finally the member gets to the issue

when he says: why have you not returned phone calls? We've met with that action group. We outlined the rigorous amount of research that was being done on the code. We've talked about what's been happening throughout the long-term process of the ability for the Department of Labour to examine this issue when it needed to be examined.

Mr. Speaker, what I find very interesting is when the member makes the allegations -- and I guess he talks about tablings tomorrow, tablings in days subsequent, and tablings in days before -- he's tabling, in fact, information that has been put out in the Department of Labour, in the library. There's over 1,300 pages of information that not only does the member have the ability to examine, go through, be able to make phone calls, be able to table documents, but also that information has been spent very carefully in a meeting that was held in the Department of Labour, a meeting that lasted well over two hours, with an important group of concerned constituents, and something that's been worked on very hard and diligently by a member from St. Albert.

What we find is that that is not the only group we're working with. I would invite the member to go and check again all the information that sits on the records in the Department of Labour but also to check the web site, because all the information that we have available, we are making available to consumer groups, to members of the Legislature, to manufacturers, to warrantees. This is an important subject. It's an important subject to Edmonton constituencies, but it's an important subject to us at the Department of Labour as well.

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds, hon. members, we'll proceed with recognizing the first hon. member for Recognitions, and that will be the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we'll proceed on this basis. First of all the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, then the hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Pinnacle Awards

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, on November 18, 1998, it was my honour to attend the Pinnacle awards presentations at the Macdonald hotel in Edmonton. The Pinnacle awards recognize entrepreneurial excellence and were introduced in northern Alberta in 1992 by the law firm Fraser Milner. Each year a selection panel of business leaders from the Edmonton area selects up to five Pinnacle winners.

Today I'm pleased to note the following recipients: Mike Duff of the Design Group Staffing Services Inc., Richard Buxton and Garry Dickieson from Black Cat Blades Ltd., Ed Bean of Crystal Glass Canada Ltd., Sandy and Ron Pearson of Century Sales & Service Limited., and Marv Holland of Marv Holland Industries. My congratulations to all who saw their vision become a reality through their entrepreneurial skills and the development of their companies.

Thank you.

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

Candas Jane Dorsey

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The YWCA's 12th Annual Tribute to Women of Distinction Dinner last June

honoured 64 women nominated in 11 categories. I would like to recognize Candace Jane Dorsey, recipient of the Woman of Distinction award in the category of arts and culture.

Candace Jane Dorsey is a prize-winning novelist and poet. She is also the publisher and managing editor of Tesseract Books and River Books, two Edmonton-based publishing companies. Candace nurtures new talent through writing workshops and has helped organize established writers. She's a founding member of the Writers' Guild of Alberta and has been actively involved with the Writers' Association of Canada and SF Canada, an organization for writers of speculative fiction.

I'm proud to have known Candace for many years. I ask members of the Legislature to join with me in our heartfelt congratulations. Well done, Candace.

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

Northern Alberta Aquatic Rescue Society

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the Northern Alberta Aquatic Rescue Society, NAARS, which was founded in 1994 and is headquartered in my area. Members of NAARS are volunteers who are highly trained in search and rescue missions in aquatic environments. They are the only mobile aquatic emergency water rescue team serving the area from Red Deer north in our province.

Their first official response was to help the Edmonton police department in the case of the missing boy, Hisaya Okumiya, who was later found drowned in the Mill Creek ravine in 1995. They've been involved in many missions since then in Mere Lake, Buck Lake, Cold Lake, Grist Lake, Wizard Lake, the North Saskatchewan River, and many other places across the province. Last month I attended one of their fund-raising functions, and I had the great pleasure of meeting many of the outstanding volunteer citizens who comprise NAARS. Today I feel honoured to recognize them and to thank them on behalf of all Albertans for the courageous and effective work they do. Thank you, Cliff Bergunde, president, and friends Diana Ungarian, Kim Torrance, and the many others involved with NAARS. You are an integral part of the Alberta Disaster Services, RCMP detachments, and the Edmonton Police Service, and we wish you continued success in all of your endeavours.

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

2:40 Alberta Medicare Coalition

MS BARRETT: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to recognize a very large group of Albertans who have been working extremely hard over the last few months to ensure that the voices of people who want our hospitals to remain public have been heard by this Assembly. It's a group with members province-wide who cross political boundaries, all of whom have spent countless volunteer hours to educate and inform themselves, their friends and neighbours, and members of the public. I'm speaking of the Alberta Medicare Coalition. The coalition has ensured that both sides of the debate about private, for-profit hospitals have been raised with the public and with all of us as MLAs. I congratulate this group for its hard work and dedication to the political process and the democratic process.

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

Pacific Northwest Economic Region

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to take a moment and recognize a very unique organization and the people that work within it. Sometimes politicians are noted for being contrary to one another and not working together very well, but the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, of which I'm the president, this weekend had a working group on tourism in Victoria. We had legislators from the political parties of the Republicans and the Democrats all working together with the private sector in their states, and we had a situation where the hon. minister of tourism from British Columbia, Ian Waddell, and our minister for tourism here in Alberta, Pat Nelson, were making presentations and doing it in a unified way. We had the private sector from Washington and British Columbia working together. I've got to say that from the Alberta side we had a situation where the hon. Member for Calgary-East could not make a particular event and the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark filled in to set the stage for a wonderful conference.

Thank you very much.

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

Telus Mobility

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Recently the National Quality Institute announced its awards, and one of the recipients was Telus Mobility. Telus Mobility was a trophy recipient in the area of quality for a large service organization. Telus Mobility has distinguished itself as a leader with an unsurpassed commitment to customer service in an ongoing quest for continuing improvement. With the highest market penetration rate in Canada Telus Mobility serves more than 450,000 cellular users in Alberta. A wholly owned subsidiary of Telus Corporation, which is Canada's third largest telecommunications company and growing, Telus Mobility has more than 700 employees and provides a full range of wireless telecommunication services and products.

Since a leadership team devised the mobility business model in 1991, there is an ongoing effort to extend shared beliefs around the company's five major drivers of business success, those being customers, employees, partners, continuous improvement, and shareholder value. Without a doubt, Telus Mobility hears the voice of its customer. The organization enlists an independent agency to conduct weekly customer surveys to determine the needs and the current levels of satisfaction. My congratulations to Telus Mobility.

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

Mount Royal College Applied Degree Program

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take the opportunity to make a few brief statements about Mount Royal College in my constituency, specifically the department of social services, Faculty of Community and Health Studies. The department has been at work over several months integrating and developing an application for an applied degree model, and that is something under consideration by this government, but I did feel it was appropriate to talk about it not so much in the success of its proposal but in the need to integrate our postsecondary training programs with some of the larger social issues that we deal with.

This unique and innovative interdisciplinary curriculum combines theoretical and practical knowledge of children, family, and community development with assessment, planning, imple-

menting, and evaluating cost in human effectiveness programs. It draws on the disciplines of psychology, early childhood education, community rehabilitation, social work, child and youth care, health studies, and business.

Mr. Speaker, I bring this to your attention because in order to successfully implement the initiative of children's services, we need qualified and educated leaders in the field of child care. On behalf of Mount Royal I present this to you.

THE SPEAKER: On a purported point of order, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Citation, please.

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

MRS. MacBETH: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would cite Standing Order 23(h).

My point of order is that I fully expect the government to use my public record to try and score whatever political points they can. That's a given; public record is public record. I'm happy to stand by my record. What I certainly didn't expect them to do was breach parliamentary precedent and start talking about records of discussions that were held in cabinet. My concern is that if the Premier wants to talk about cabinet discussions and positions that various ministers took at the time, then perhaps he would like to open himself out to the discussions on the Alberta Treasury Branches mall refinancing for West Edmonton Mall as part of cabinet confidentiality as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on this point.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can understand the sensitivity that the hon. Leader of the Opposition has to the fact that many of the positions that she was taking when she was part of the government and served on government benches are a matter of public record and that she's being reminded from time to time of those discussions.

Clearly the positions that she's taking, what the Premier was alluding to in question period today, are decisions that are being made and positions that she took as a member of government. If she didn't agree with those positions as a member of government, she obviously would have stepped aside and said she didn't agree and resigned at that time. Instead, it took her some period of time to leave government. So I don't think there was anything in question period where the Premier was referring to decisions made in cabinet that were cabinet decisions. He was referring to decisions that were made as a member of government, and she obviously supported those decisions because she remained a member of government after those decisions were made.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I would refer hon. members to *Beauchesne* 480(2):

Reference to debates of the current session is discouraged even if such reference is relevant, as it tends to re-open matters already decided. The same result is often obtained by indirect methods. Direct reference is permitted, however, when a Member wishes to complain of something said or to clear up misrepresentation or make a personal explanation, but only such of the previous speech should be brought up as is necessary for such purposes.

So in listening very clearly to the arguments made the by Leader of the Official Opposition, it would seem to me that the focus should have been on "to clear up misrepresentation or make a personal explanation."

One would also like to draw to the attention of all hon. members *Beauchesne* 494, which is probably the most interesting of all the statements in *Beauchesne*:

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members as being contrary to the facts; but no imputation of intentional falsehood is permissible. On rare occasions this may result in the House having to accept two contradictory accounts of the same incident.

And that's where the chair finds himself at this point.

Before moving on to Orders of the Day, might we have the indulgence of the House to call on two members for introductions?

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: First of all, the Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like now to invite the House to give a warm welcome and recognize the presence of Ms Val Benoit and a number of members and friends that she has from a group that is of the acronym of DWAG. This is the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group, Alberta chapter. I would ask them to rise at this time and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly and thank them for being here today.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have often spoken of how fortunate and honoured I am to have so many senior citizens living in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre. We're joined here today in the public gallery by one of those senior citizens, a very special woman to me. She's given me a great deal of support and volunteers on a regular basis several days a week in my constituency office. I would ask Ms Doe McAnulty to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

head: Orders of the Day
2:50

head: Written Questions

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 97.

[Motion carried]

Private Schools Funding Task Force

Q97. Dr. Massey moved that the following question be accepted: Of the 12,000 written submissions, E-mails, and records of telephone calls to the Private Schools Funding Task Force, established in 1997, what was the breakdown of the numbers of those who made submissions in favour of increasing funding, those opposed to increasing funding, and those who were neutral on the issue?

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to the request, the recommendations and the government's action on the recommendations of the Private Schools Funding Task Force remain a thorn in the side of many public school supporters. Many of those who attended meetings across the province have remained upset in terms of the outcome of those deliberations.

We look at some of the recommendations and the analysis that the government provided us in the work by Praxis Inc. and find some discrepancies, so the analysis is one that we would like to have a chance to examine.

Thank you.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I will accept Written Question 97.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to close debate.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and we thank the minister for accepting that question.

[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 with the exception of Motion for a Return 98.

[Motion carried]

Private Schools Funding Task Force

M98. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the 12,000 written submissions, E-mails, and records of telephone calls to the Private Schools Funding Task Force, established in 1997.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, making comments about our concern for the seeming discrepancy between the recommendations that appeared in the Private Schools Funding Task Force and the input from Albertans, we would like a chance to look at those materials. I guess one of the concerns we have is exactly what was included. For instance, do the petitions that the task force examined include the petitions that were filed in this Assembly, or were they only the ones that were directed to the task force itself? We realize in making this request that there is a great deal of material involved and that there are considerable costs in trying to assemble that in the form that the motion requests, and we would be amenable to working with the department to be allowed to examine the originals without requiring all the copying that this motion would imply.

Again, if I can go back to our major concern, we find that the interpreting of the raw material -- the questionnaires, the petitions, the letters, the E-mails -- was directed by the Private Schools Funding Task Force and that even though the work was done by a consulting firm, there seems to be some discrepancy in terms of what eventually appeared as recommendations in the task force report and the materials that we understood had been submitted to them. The reporting provided to us by the ministry does not do much to allay the concerns that we have. So I would ask that this motion be approved.

Thank you.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Private Schools Funding Task Force consulted extensively. That consultation included over 12,000 written submissions done by workbook, letter, and petition. Motion for a Return 98 has asked for copies of all of these submissions plus copies of E-mail and phone records.

Mr. Speaker, those people who called or sent E-mails were mailed a workbook, so those are included among the written submissions. I refer to *Beauchesne* 446, which sets out the criteria by which papers or documents are exempt from production. Subsection (g) clearly identifies: "Papers of a voluminous character or which would require an inordinate cost or length of time to prepare." Albertans submitted more than 9,000 copies of the eight-page workbook. That would represent 60,000 pages of material on top of the time and cost to remove the personal information from the material to protect the privacy of all respondents under FOIP legislation. The responses are available in an electronic format, but we would still face the daunting task and cost of removing personal information. Therefore, I propose the rejection of this motion for a return.

However, this government does want to be of assistance with respect to the request of the member. As I indicated this past March, if the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods could identify what specific facts he wished to verify, we may be able to extract and provide that data at a more reasonable cost to the taxpayer.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, just an observation in listening to the comment of the Minister of Education, who clearly is trying to be helpful. I am on a select special committee dealing with the statutorily mandated three-year review of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. One of the issues is whether that act should be extended to cover private schools. It was interesting to me that nobody made a submission, that I can recall of the 110-odd submissions we received, from a private school in terms of whether they should be covered by FOIP or not.

What was interesting was that when as a committee we started discussing that, one of the members of that committee also happened to have been the chairman of the Private Schools Funding Task Force. Reference was made to a number of submissions in that task force consultation in terms of whether private schools should be subject or not to the freedom of information legislation. It's an interesting proposition, because many of us thought that that task force was only dealing with funding. We hadn't realized it was dealing with a whole range of other education issues. Then what happens is that this other process, this all-party panel, ends up having to sort of incorporate by reference things that members of the FOIP panel have never been able to see, have not been able to access. So I raise that as a concern.

I'm sensitive to both the privacy issues by people who had responded and the voluminous nature of the material, but I'd invite the Minister of Education to consider that for purposes certainly of the select special committee's work it would be very helpful if at least there could be some analysis done in terms of the number of people who commented on that and maybe some samples of the comments made, Mr. Minister, without attribution to individual Albertans so that those of us on the committee would have a better sense, because most of us were not on that government-only Private Schools Funding Task Force.

So I raise that simply as yet another consideration as to why these kinds of submissions, which have then become a part of government policy and in fact are having sort of a leverage effect in other areas -- there's a real concern to the extent that none of this can be adequately accessed.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to close the debate.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for his offer, and we will follow up.

My colleague has just mentioned some confirmation that would have led to the government's position on the freedom of information act. We had other questions, and I mentioned a couple of them. One was that we would like to be able to trace back the recommendation to increase funding by 20 percent, how that particular number was arrived at from the data. We would like to find exactly where the strength and the support came from for private schools being able to continue to select students and turn others away. We have a list of questions that we will follow up, and I again thank the minister for his offer.

[Motion lost]

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

Bill 215
Highway Traffic Amendment Act, 1998

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure for me to rise today to speak to third reading of Bill 215. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my colleagues for sharing their views on the use of red-light enforcement devices. Over the course of the last year there has been an increased awareness of the use of red-light cameras. With the pilot projects being set up in Sherwood Park and Edmonton, we have seen that the cameras are highly effective in curbing the number of red-light violations. These test projects have already served to protect and save the lives of both the motorists and pedestrians. They have allowed the police officers to focus on other areas of crime control that need their attention, and they have caused motorists to be more aware and responsible for their actions.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

There are a couple of points on the use of these red-light cameras that I would like to clarify. Throughout the debate in this Chamber and in discussions with my constituents and other members of the public a number of questions have arisen, and I think it is important to take the time to provide some answers. I would like, first, to address the question of what happens if you slide through an intersection during poor winter-driving conditions. Madam Speaker, motorists should know to alter their driving behaviour and the speed of their vehicle during poor winter-driving conditions. These precautionary measures would serve to prevent them from sliding into the intersection on a red light.

I would like to point out that the red-light camera takes two images. The first picture is taken at the crosswalk stop bar. The second picture is taken when the vehicle is approximately halfway through the intersection. The second photo is based on a time/distance calculation. When viewing the second picture of the vehicle in the intersection, it will be determined if there was an actual violation by, number one, the speed of the vehicle; two, the position of the vehicle in the intersection based on a time/distance calculation; and three, if the brake lights are not on. Madam Speaker, I should also emphasize that a quality-control check is completed on each violation by three individuals, including a police officer, to verify that a violation has in fact occurred.

One of the other most common questions I've had is: what would happen if you were in an intersection, turning left on a

yellow light, and the traffic light turned red? Red-light cameras are set not only so that those vehicles that enter an intersection after the light has turned red are photographed. Drivers who enter on a yellow and find themselves in the intersection when the light changes red are not photographed. The technology is intended to capture vehicles driven by motorists who intentionally enter an intersection well after the signal has turned red.

Lastly, Madam Speaker, I would like to clarify that the photographs taken by these cameras are in fact reviewed before motorists are sent a ticket through the mail. In Edmonton a trained police officer along with two other trained individuals review every picture to verify the information and ensure that the vehicle has clearly gone through a red light.

Madam Speaker, there's one other comment I would like to make in regard to the history of red-light cameras. It was mentioned by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo in a debate over the amendment.

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.

Well, I would like to point out that red-light enforcement devices have in fact been used since 1968 and that photoradar has been used since 1958. Over this significant period of time photo enforcement has been proven to be an accurate, reliable, and effective traffic safety tool. Madam Speaker, photographic detection devices have been and are being used in over 45 countries worldwide, including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Taiwan, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and 11 states in the United States. There are over 2,500 red-light cameras in operation around the world.

Having answered these questions and clarified these points, I would end by reiterating some of the statements I made upon introduction of this bill. One life lost as a result of a senseless and preventable accident is one too many. I have said many times to those with whom I have had this discussion that this bill, Bill 215, is about safety and prevention on Alberta's streets. It is about the effectiveness of the technology available and the efficient use of our police forces. With that said, I would like to encourage members in this Assembly to support Bill 215 in its final stage of debate before this House.

At this point, Madam Speaker, I wish to adjourn debate. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Redwater, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

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

Bill 216
Citizen's Initiative Act

[Debate adjourned November 24: Mrs. Forsyth speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

3:10

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thanks, Madam Speaker. I'd like to continue from where I left off yesterday.

The people of Alberta are fortunate to have a government which provides for this through its consultation. Bill 216 would only serve to enhance that sentiment. This bill is very much consistent with the policy of openness and accountability and would, again, serve to enhance public confidence in the political system by limiting the ability of interest groups to dominate the initiation process through limits on spending. Bill 216 allows politicians to get a clear sense of direction directly from the elector and not filtered through interest groups.

I understand that there are some concerns about Bill 216, which I would like to take a moment to address. One of the most commonly heard concerns about this sort of legislation is the possibility of initiatives forcing the hands of the Legislature. This certainly is a valid concern as the supremacy of the Legislature is an important part of our political system. Indeed, to violate the rights of the Legislature is unconstitutional. Fortunately, such concerns are not relevant in this instance.

There is no constitutional flaw in Bill 216 as there was with, for example, Manitoba's Initiative and Referendum Act, which was repealed earlier in the century. Madam Speaker, the Initiative and Referendum Act allowed for citizens' initiatives to be brought forward by the electors. Signatures of not less than 8 percent of the number of votes cast in the last election were required on a petition in order to propose a law. Unless this proposal was enacted, it would then have to go to a direct vote at the next general election. Again, the proposal could not be outside the jurisdiction of the province, nor could it be a measure of appropriateness. This act was eventually challenged in the courts. In 1937 the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, which at that time was the highest judicial authority in Canada, overturned the law because it encroached on the powers of the Lieutenant Governor.

However, this is not the case at all with Bill 216. The integrity of the Legislature is upheld with the legislation. The results of the initiative election are not binding on the government. If it is successful, the government need only introduce a bill as per the initiative. That is where the government obligation ends. There is no provision stating that the government must pass the bill; it need only be introduced and put on the Order Paper. Beyond that, MLAs can vote for or against it according to the wishes of their constituents. The important points to remember are that citizens have the ability to propose the issue and that there is no requirement for the Legislature to pass this bill.

Another concern I've heard is that majorities may attempt to undermine the rights of minorities. This is also an important concern but, again, unfounded with respect to Bill 216. First, for an initiative election to be successful, broad support is needed from across the province by 60 percent of all Albertans and by no less than 60 percent of Albertans in 55 of 83 constituencies. I believe that anything which detracted from or infringed upon minority rights would not be able to pass these two tests. Even considering the possibility, Madam Speaker, the Legislature still has the final say on the matter and would not allow minority rights to be trampled on. Lastly and perhaps most importantly in addressing this concern, anything which violates the minority rights provision of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms could not even be proposed. These concerns about minority rights were taken into account by the original and current sponsors of this bill, and they have ensured that the provisions of the bill compensated for them.

There are other concerns that initiatives may just bring up one

particular issue over and over again. The provisions set out in the bill compensated for that concern by not allowing more than one petition dealing with a given issue at a time, and no petition can be proposed which deals with a matter dealt with by an initiative election in the preceding three years.

F frivolous petitions on matters not of any particular concern to Albertans will also be avoided due to a provision of this bill. The requirement for forcing an initiative election is nearly 100,000 signatures, 94,834 to be exact, to be collected in six months, and 10 percent of the constituents in two-thirds of the ridings must also sign. These are strenuous demands for a petition, Madam Speaker, but by no means are they unattainable, nor are they overly burdensome on the sponsor. If the issue is of importance to Albertans and something they wish to have debated in the Legislature, then I'm positive that the signature requirements will be met.

I believe that this bill provides a good balance between the rights of the citizens to put forward proposals and the need to block frivolous initiative elections.

Madam Speaker, on the whole, Bill 216 serves to enhance the democratic traditions of the province. It provides for a formal method by which electors can have input into the legislative process. It maintains the integrity of our democratic institution. It gives the power back to the rightful owners of this province, our citizens, and it brings a greater sense of efficiency to our electors. On balance, I believe that Bill 216 incorporates many of the principles that myself and many other Albertans support, and as such I encourage all members of the Legislature to support Bill 216 at second reading.

Thanks.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. In 1994 I had the opportunity to speak to what was then Bill 203, which was a similar initiative. There are some changes. I supported Bill 203 in 1994, so the question that this member had in going through this bill and comparing it with the 1994 version was in determining whether there were significant differences that would warrant changing vote or changing position. Then the other thing is to consider what's happened in the bigger communities since 1994 in terms of whether the need that I thought existed in 1994 is still there. Has it been addressed in some other way? Does it still exist?

I guess where I come to is that although I don't agree with all of the commentary I've heard by proponents of the bill, I come down to supporting the bill, and I do so chiefly for this reason. Madam Speaker, I think the single biggest limitation that exists in this Assembly is party discipline. I think one of the single biggest limitations in terms of this Chamber being able to realize its potential is what I would characterize as an overly rigid party discipline. I'm always struck by the fact that other Legislatures have succeeded in freeing up members to have a larger degree of freedom, particularly when it comes to voting on issues, than exists in this Legislature.

I think what's attractive to me about a citizen's initiative bill, notwithstanding what I think are some significant flaws and problems with it, is that it's yet another attempt -- all we're dealing with at this stage is principles because it's at second reading, and there's lots to be said in terms of detail and things that could be changed and things that could be varied. But any member who thinks there ought to be more scope and more opportunity for members to vote in a more individual way and a more responsive way for their constituents than simply what their

whip tells them to do I think should be supporting Bill 216 at second reading stage at least.

I think we're going to have an opportunity, if this bill succeeds in getting majority support, to be able to address at the committee stage a number of what I consider fairly significant procedural problems with the process. They're there, and clearly that represents a challenge, but I'd hate to see us get so focused on some of the technical difficulties that we lose sight of the more important potential and the message in this bill. You know, hon. members, through the chair, I'd suggest that simply passing the bill and getting it out of second reading sends a signal to the leadership in this House, to the whips and the deputy whips and those people who have a primary responsibility in terms of how the business of the House is managed, a message that I think can't be ignored. At least to this member, that's a compelling reason why Bill 216 deserves to be able to get to that next detailed consideration, at the committee stage.

You know, I go through this, and clearly there are some process concerns. I'll get to those in a moment. It seems to me that elections only happen perhaps every four years in this province, and I think there are a range of issues which occur that don't conveniently happen just in the 60 days before an election. Issues happen during those four years. I think there may be some members in this Assembly who have a view that somehow we're so darn effective at monitoring the pulse of our constituents that if we don't collectively see something as being an issue, then it doesn't belong on the floor of the Assembly. I don't believe that.

I think it's compounded when you have two or in this case three parties in the Assembly. Each of those parties has particular things that they want to accomplish. This may be heresy to some, but I'm going to suggest that it may be that even those established parties don't always get it absolutely right, that there may be some issues in the bigger community that don't make it through the filters of caucus and past the voting discipline. You may get a few members who may want to raise something, but frankly there's a culture in this place that I think discourages some of those individual initiatives. Who loses at the end of the day? Well, I think it's citizens. It's citizens. You know, to those members: I'm going to go through and talk about some of the analysis we've heard. I think that sometimes we don't realize how intimidating the legislative process is to the people who are paying the freight, to the people who don't have the privilege we do of sitting in this place and knowing what's going on and being able to stand up and make speeches and ask questions. Yet surely we all agree that at the end of the day this place is to serve those people, not to serve us.

3:20

You know, my belief is that there are a lot of Albertans who are, frankly, uncomfortable with partisanship and are uncomfortable with political parties. Notwithstanding the fact that Albertans tend to vote overwhelmingly for one party federally or one party provincially, as a native Albertan I'd have to tell you that I think most Albertans don't go around branding themselves with a party label. They may tend to vote in a similar way, but I think for the most part they're not locked into some partisan ideology. In any event, that's just sort of by way of context that brings me to the point of still supporting the principle of this bill.

[The Speaker in the chair]

I want to go through some of the debate we heard the other day. It's interesting. There was one comment made on November 17 that said that a bill "merely gets introduced into the

Legislative Assembly without any guarantee of debate. This in fact sounds like empty symbolism." Well, with respect to that commentator, I'd have to say that rather than being empty symbolism, this is an artful compromise. It's an artful compromise. I would be the first one to be offended if we were committed somehow for a law to be passed because you got a petition and you had a group that worked hard to get a particular thing brought forward. The point is that all that this bill does is effectively mean that there's an issue on the public agenda of the province of Alberta. What on earth would be the matter with that? It still means that it has to be subjected to robust debate in this Assembly. To the people who feel that somehow our system is going to be hijacked because a referendum is brought in, because this issue is on the floor, what does that say about our ability as legislators to debate, to vote, and be accountable to our constituents?

So the final, ultimate test is where it always belongs, with the elected people. All we're talking about is getting issues which are of significance to our constituents onto the floor of this Assembly and onto the Order Paper and subject to debate. Every member is still going to be responsible. This is not a question of deflecting or ducking responsibility, because every member in this Assembly is going to have to stand in their place at the appropriate time and be accountable in terms of how they vote, whatever way that vote is, and they're going to have to answer the questions of constituents. Far from this being empty symbolism, I think it is an artful compromise.

Now, there's a great deal of concern about special-interest groups, and indeed just the other day I received and maybe other members received a note from a group which has already drafted their petition. I think it's the Canada Family Action Coalition. You know, I have lots of problems with what they want to do, although I haven't looked carefully at the whole proposal. That might clearly be something that I'd speak against and vote against and hopefully be able to persuade my caucus, if that was a government bill, that that's what we should do. You know, I'm not afraid to see that brought forward and debated here, because ultimately that's still where the responsibility is going to rest. I understand people being concerned that our rigid party system loses a little bit of control this way, Mr. Speaker, but I'd like members to view that as a positive.

There has been a concern that this is a way for members who lack political spine. I think those were the words that I saw used by one member the other day, that some member lacking political spine would be able to come in and the bill would be brought in. You know, that would only be the case if we ignored, firstly, the opportunity for people to speak, secondly, what they say, then thirdly, how they vote, and fourthly, if they had to stand, how they stand. So it seems to me that the ultimate accountability to constituents is still clearly there.

Now, there are certainly some concerns with the timing, and I do want to address some of the detailed thoughts I had with respect to the proposal. I'd just remind members that at the municipal level we have given citizens the opportunity to attempt to put issues on the public agenda, and members are familiar with those provisions. Why is it that we wouldn't have a corresponding parallel provision in this arena and at the provincial level? There are concerns with the provision for the wording of the initiative petition and the limit in terms of the number of the words. There are issues in terms of how the bill would be drafted, and I've got some proposals I'd share with members if this gets to the committee stage.

There has been some criticism, and I saw a criticism the other day that there was a problem in terms of the fact it couldn't be a money bill and a suggestion that that somehow made a mockery

of the process. I don't accept that. There are limits, and I think we can deal with those. I think the 60 percent limit for support is, frankly, wholly unrealistic. I think it's paternalistic. I don't support that, and that would be one of the amendments that I would be hoping some member would bring forward to make the bill more palatable. You can't have an entirely different threshold at the provincial level than exists at the municipal level.

I think that there are some concerns with the restrictions. It's not good enough simply to say -- I don't take the comfort that the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek did in section 2(2). It should also provide that the petition would be out of order if it contravened not only the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms but also the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act, because that's another important bill that limits what kinds of things are going to be acceptable in terms of discriminatory practices. That would be an amendment that I would hope the sponsor or at least someone else would introduce to address that concern as well.

In terms of restricting it, I'd like to see it very clear, because we've seen too many initiatives raised by the provincial government which are within the legislative competence of the federal government. I don't, frankly, have much patience, Mr. Speaker, for spending our time -- we've been elected to do a job in terms of assessing provincial issues. We're paid to do a job provincially. There's a whole flock of people that are elected to the House of Commons to worry about how the Criminal Code should be amended or what the Canadian Wheat Board policy ought to be or whether there should be a Canadian Wheat Board.

MR. LUND: That's our concern too.

MR. DICKSON: Well, all of these things are also a concern, but I say that the things we're uniquely elected to deal with are health and education and social services. That's our primary job.

I don't want to be a municipal councillor. If I'd wanted to deal with municipal issues, Mr. Speaker, I would have run municipally. I'm not here to create foreign policy for the federal government, because if I'd wanted to do that, I would have run federally. I'm here because I wanted some say in what goes on in education and health care. I think there should be a restriction in the bill that ensures that those initiatives speak to the things that we have exclusive legislative competence to deal with.

3:30

The thought that it can't involve an expenditure of funds reminds me a little bit of a discussion that happened in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. You'll recall that in fact on Saturday at the parliamentary conference there was discussion about private members chafing at the limitation of not being able to introduce in a private member's bill something that would involve the expenditure of public funds. I think what was discussed at that time was that there are creative ways of dealing with that. Arguably any bill may require some expenditure of dollars, but if it's not in fact imposing a tax in a pretty clear way, one would hope for some flexible interpretation so that the disqualification in section 2(2)(a) wouldn't become a significant impediment to the bill moving forward.

I think there are people who are concerned that there's no real requirement on the provincial government in terms of a bill being introduced and debated in a timely way, but the most powerful tool anytime is public opinion, and it's public opinion which may find voice in the form of a direct initiative, a citizen's initiative. Ultimately this Chamber, in some cases more quickly and in some cases more slowly, has to reflect what Albertans want, as best we can discern that from time to time. I think I can see some

significant changes that would have to be made to the bill before it could become an acceptable piece of legislation, at least from this member's perspective.

I come back to what I started out saying, that the most important thing is that we nurture an idea that potentially can liberate individual MLAs in a way few other things can do. This isn't exhaustive, and there may be some other tools and devices to do it. But I as one private member see an initiative like this, and I want to support it and I want to encourage it. I'd hate to see it stillborn. I'd hate to see this not get to the next stage. We'll have a really robust discussion at the next stage in terms of what those amendments should be. But what do we say to Albertans if we can't even get to that stage?

I know there are other members anxious to speak. Those are the comments I wanted to make at second reading. Thanks very much.

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to participate in the debate on Bill 216, the Citizen's Initiative Act. At the root of our political system is democracy, democracy by, of, and for the people. The bill we're debating today, the Citizen's Initiative Act, provides the electorate of this province with an even more direct means by which to participate in the affairs of government, that of direct democracy.

The key features of direct democracy are the referendum, the citizen's initiative, and recall. Referendums usually propose questions for approval brought forward by the government, while a citizen's initiative is of course initiated by a member of the electorate. Recall is the ability of citizens to petition for the removal of an elected representative. Many jurisdictions in Canada and other countries have some form of direct democracy legislation in place.

Mr. Speaker, the most common form of direct democracy legislation in Canada is provincewide referendum legislation, which currently exists in every province except Ontario and Nova Scotia. We know that British Columbia has a Recall and Initiative Act, passed in 1995, that allows the electors both the ability to bring forward a citizen's initiative and to initiate a recall process against MLAs. One of the best known examples of referendum use is in the country of Switzerland. Switzerland has had legislation allowing for both government and citizen initiative referendums which are binding on the government. The citizen's initiative has had a positive history in that country and indeed is an integral part of the political process there. However, with the low thresholds that are set out, there is a danger of the referendum and initiative process being dominated by special-interest groups.

Bill 216 focuses only on one of these elements of direct democracy, the citizen's initiative. Mr. Speaker, there are already mechanisms in Alberta's current legislation allowing for referendums that are initiated by the government. The Citizen's Initiative Act differs from these others in that it allows referendums initiated at the grassroots level. Bill 216 does not include any sort of recall mechanism, and I feel that regular elections adequately address that issue. What we have before us is a bill that has within it a number of checks and balances that are put in place to ensure that citizens' initiatives are neither overused nor abused. A delicate balance had to be struck concerning thresholds for petitions and elections and the number of initiatives that could be outstanding at any one time so that initiatives would not be too difficult nor too easy to bring forward. I believe that Bill 216 has achieved that balance.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 216 will enhance our present democratic system while ensuring the supremacy of the Legisla-

ture. Proposed legislation, if passed, would still have to go through the same legislative process as ordinary bills do. The proposed bill allows for a process which essentially gives the public the opportunity to initiate a referendum exercise on their own without having to rely on government putting forth the question to the voters. In today's society there's a very large sense of disillusionment with the concept of politics in general. The average voter no longer feels that the decisions they make in terms of their representatives at every level or on specific issues have any impact on the final outcome, but certainly in Alberta we have been a leader in addressing these issues through extensive public consultation processes that the government carries out on its legislation and major issues of importance such as national unity.

Do we need more elements of direct democracy in Canada's political system? Would the selective use of the referendum and even the initiative encourage greater citizen participation in the affairs of government and serve to add a greater legitimacy to the decisions which are made? I ask these questions to each member of this Assembly and offer my opinion that, yes, the element of a more direct democracy would make a difference to the citizens of this province. In fact, Mr. Speaker, these ideas are certainly not a new concept in Canadian politics. They have been used more widely than we may realize. A few examples include the 1942 plebiscite on conscription, the 1988 referendum on the fixed-link connection between Prince Edward Island and the mainland, and the 1992 vote in the Northwest Territories regarding the creation of a new and separate territory in the eastern Arctic.

Mr. Speaker, this bill, the Citizen's Initiative Act, is an ideal opportunity for Albertans to take responsibility for their political system, to further illustrate that they do have a say in the decisions that are made. With this type of mechanism in place, it would encourage citizens to make the effort to become more informed and involved in the political system, that plays such an integral part in every aspect of their lives.

Public participation in the democratic process is essential, and it is something that has declined over the years. One has only to look at some of the voter turnout rates in recent elections in order to realize this fact. There's political apathy that exists among the people not only in this province but in provinces around the country. With this bill we are providing additional opportunities to participate in the process and lessen those feelings of apathy. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that this type of initiative is seen as a supplement to and not an alternative for the traditional methods of participation centred on elections and political parties.

I must say once again that opportunities for citizens to express themselves on matters regarding the government do exist in the form of elections. There's no intent to replace these elections or to supplant the powers of the Legislature. Bill 216 merely adds opportunities for participation on the part of the electorate in the form of citizens' initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to close by saying that the only way to have government of the people, by the people, and for the people is through the people becoming active participants. We are providing this opportunity with this bill, the Citizen's Initiative Act; the rest will be up to the citizens of this province. I'll be voting in favour of Bill 216, and I'd like to take this opportunity to urge other members of this Assembly to do the same.

Thank you.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close the debate.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to stand and offer my closing comments on Bill 216, the Citizen's Initiative Act. I would like to extend my thanks to all those who have worked on this bill and supported it. My thanks to Angela Brown and Susan Williams, the researchers who helped with this bill. I'd also like to thank Mark Milke of the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation for all of his support as well as my colleagues who have voiced their support for the Citizen's Initiative Act.

The Citizen's Initiative Act will bring the very essence of democracy to the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker. Citizens will be able to bring forward their consensus and vote on a legislative proposal, thus giving them a direct say in what happens in the province they call home. Bill 216 is not meant to replace the work of elected representatives but to complement those processes that are already in place. It will not threaten the powers of the Legislature, nor will it infringe upon the authority of the Lieutenant Governor. It will not replace or interfere with the work done by the Legislative Assembly. What Bill 216 does do is create an open dialogue between this government and the people that government is meant to represent.

The Citizen's Initiative Act, Mr. Speaker, is not careless in its structure. There are many checks within the legislation which ensure that any legislation being brought forward is reflective of the views of a majority of Albertans. If these views are expressed so strongly by large numbers of Albertans, then it is our duty to consider and debate those views here in this Assembly.

We have heard many arguments both for and against Bill 216, and I'm sure those arguments will be carefully considered by all members of this Assembly when making the decision on how to vote. However, I would like to leave members with one final thought, and that thought, Mr. Speaker, is this. This province belongs to the people of Alberta, and their wishes must be represented. To ensure that this happens, it is our responsibility to provide the people of Alberta with every reasonable avenue to ensure their voices are heard. We are representatives of the people of this province, and as such we should not be afraid of what Albertans have to say. It is our duty to listen to the citizens of this province, and the Citizen's Initiative Act is a way for each and every Albertan to raise their voice to contribute to the future of this province.

I encourage the members of this Assembly to support Bill 216 and the grassroots democracy it represents. With that said, I would like to close debate and call the question on Bill 216.

THE SPEAKER: Would all hon. members in favour of second reading of Bill 216, the Citizen's Initiative Act, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Would all members opposed please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The bill is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Blakeman | Forsyth | Massey |
| Bonner | Friedel | Nicol |
| Burgener | Havelock | Smith |
| Carlson | Hierath | Soetaert |
| Day | Hlady | Taylor |
| Dickson | Leibovici | White |
| Ducharme | Marz | Zwozdesky |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Amery | Johnson | Nelson |
| Boutilier | Jonson | Olsen |
| Broda | Klapstein | Pham |
| Cardinal | Laing | Renner |
| Clegg | Langevin | Severtson |
| Coutts | Lougheed | Shariff |
| Dunford | Lund | Stevens |
| Fritz | Magnus | Tannas |
| Gordon | McClellan | Thurber |
| Herard | McFarland | Yankowsky |
| Jacques | Melchin | |

Totals: For -- 21 Against -- 32

[Motion lost]

Bill 217
Alberta Economic Development Authority
Amendment Act, 1998

[Adjourned debate November 18: Mr. Langevin]

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to speak to Bill 217, and I would like to commend the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca for bringing this bill forward.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of the bill is worthy of serious consideration. I believe the concept is an excellent one. Regional economic councils would be extremely useful in assisting municipalities, in co-ordinating economic development, as well as other meaningful issues and priorities. At the present time it is perhaps more difficult than it should be for municipalities to co-operate in economic development for the benefit of the broader regions in which they exist and the Alberta economy as a whole.

Through regional economic development councils, as proposed in this bill, municipalities would have a much better chance to co-ordinate their ideas and resources for the mutual benefits of all the communities in the region. This co-operation would benefit all Albertans, because communities could then co-ordinate their economic development priorities as a unified region. These priorities and goals would be agreed upon by the regional council and then submitted to the Minister of Economic Development in the form of a regional action plan.

Currently, Mr. Speaker, at times there can be a lack of co-ordination among chambers of commerce across the province, which in certain cases has hindered the creation and implementation of a unified economic development plan that would benefit the Alberta economy. Regional councils as envisioned in this bill would improve the situation. Chambers of commerce could continue to maintain a local focus, and at the same time regional councils would be able to help promote the local economies at the regional level and help promote regional economies at the provincial level.

Mr. Speaker, these regional councils could do a great deal to assist municipalities in their effort to attract specific economic development projects, particularly large projects. With the help of the regional councils it would become much easier for municipalities to collaborate and pool ideas and resources when trying to attract investment and development projects to the broader region. Rather than having a situation where municipalities are acting as rivals, the council would serve to create a climate of co-operation amongst the municipalities of a larger region.

Mr. Speaker, if a group of municipalities or communities recognized the need to develop an organization to co-ordinate economic development on a regional basis, then they can certainly take the necessary steps to create such an organization. In fact, it is true that regional development organizations already exist in some areas of the province. Groups such as Prosperity South and the Northern Alberta Development Council are already playing a role very similar to what is being proposed in this bill.

4:00

However, Mr. Speaker, these types of organizations are not focused specifically on economic development objectives. They strive towards less tangible goals and objectives, such as regional prosperity and sustainable development. Regional economic development councils, on the other hand, will have a clear and concise mandate to deal with the issues of regional economic development and planning. By allowing the recognition of regional economic development councils, this bill will facilitate the important process of bringing people together to make planning decisions and to promote development.

It is true, Mr. Speaker, that the Alberta advantage is still very strong. The policies of this government have allowed business and industries to flourish, providing jobs for thousands of Albertans and keeping Alberta's unemployment rate at the lowest level in Canada. The Alberta advantage is the envy of Canada and much of the world. Economic development in Alberta continues to allow the province to maintain a high annual rate of economic growth. This has not happened by accident. Clearly the policies of this government have created a climate of hope and opportunity that is unequaled in Canada and much of the world.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, we all know that Alberta's economy is resource based, is highly cyclical, and can be volatile. For these reasons it is important that local economies are strong and based on a firm foundation. Alberta's local economies must be given the tools to remain strong during difficult times. I believe that the province does have a role to play in helping municipal and regional economies prosper, even if it is simply a role of organizer, co-ordinator, or supervisor.

The regional economic development councils that this bill allows for and recognizes is a tremendous example of how the provincial government can help Alberta's regional economies grow and mature. By giving the municipalities of a region a forum to pursue economic development opportunities and ideas, each municipality, the regions, and all Alberta will gain. The increased participation and co-operation that the regional economic development councils will foster will help build solid links between the municipalities, the regions, and the province.

Mr. Speaker, there is yet another positive effect that regional economic development councils will have. As Alberta's cities and towns continue to grow, it is increasingly important that they identify and co-ordinate their infrastructure priorities and their delivery of services. The communication challenge that would be made available through these councils would be a tremendous asset for municipalities as they try to work together to find efficient and effective solutions to the challenges that they are

facing and the challenges that they will be facing in the next century.

Mr. Speaker, other provinces across Canada have had great success with similar programs. In particular, the Saskatchewan regional economic development authorities initiative has been very successful. The initiative encouraged groups of communities to work together with the private, co-operative, and public sectors to achieve the shared goals of partnerships: co-ordination, organizational stability, and service in regional trade areas.

Other initiatives and programs in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, and British Columbia have been beneficial also, especially for old communities. These programs have varied roles; for example, assisting in the establishment and development of facilities relating to tourism and recreation, assisting municipalities in planning and developing works or projects that benefit the general public, preparing plans for regional development, and co-ordinating and guiding regional development.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this bill is not without precedents or comparison. There is much that we can learn from the experiences of other provinces. It seems to me that this bill follows some of the best examples of regional economic development organizations that exist in Canada and elsewhere.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say again that I believe the intent of the bill is excellent. The idea of regional economic development councils has a great deal of potential, and I hope that members of this Assembly will give this bill serious consideration.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This member has given this bill some serious consideration from a municipal point of view, and it falls very, very short in two respects, not the least of which is there is no funding. Now, if anybody knows anything about municipal governments today, the single most important thing is that the pocket in which they hold their money is flat broke. It has no money to do anything extra. [interjections] Any of those on the other side that are mouthing off quite as much obviously have never sat in those chairs. I look around, and those are the ones. I see that the ones who are silent have in fact sat in those chairs and know those people who are sitting in those chairs today and know the difficulty they're having meeting that which is required by law now.

Now, there is ample opportunity for local municipal governments, local authorities, local services groups, all of those, to come together to an economic end. I can cite the airports in this city that came together some time ago on the initiative of a number of noted Tories at the time, if you will, and brought together people from all the local municipalities, and they did something in one area of economic development. I notice there's a group -- I can't quite recall what they call themselves right offhand.

MR. SMITH: The Edmonton Stickmen.

MR. WHITE: The Edmonton Stickmen. No, I don't think it's the Edmonton Stickmen, although that's a very good attempt, Minister of Labour.

They are a group that have lightly formed in the Edmonton region now to look at economic development and a number of issues related to land use planning and a number of other areas that can and will do when needed. But the last thing they need to have happen is for Big Brother, the provincial government, to impose the structure such that they have to fit into some kind of mold. That may work in one area. Yeah, it may. But there are

probably 17 to 25 others in this province where it will not. They all have their unique needs. They all have their unspoken boundaries of economic development, their local planning needs. They have all of that. And to impose it from this level would be absolutely disastrous. It would do exactly what this government has always said they do not want to do, to form other levels of government. It would do all of those things that simply are not required.

Now, if you want to do something really good for economic development in this province, make sure you tell those that are in charge of the electrical power generation in this province and particularly the minister to get on with the deregulation or get on with reregulation, get on with it, whatever he wants, to cause some power in this province such that we don't have to work on the -- right now we work on the demand side. We're trying to lower it. What kind of economic development for anywhere in Alberta is: you turn a plant off, so mama can't cook supper? This is not economic development. This bill and the time that was spent to put it together would have been much better spent three years ago working on that. Could you imagine someone at perhaps St. Paul or up -- no, I guess they don't do economic development in the same way way up there, Mr. Clegg. [interjection] Oh, they do. Sorry. Well, take Mr. Clegg's neck of the woods up there.

THE SPEAKER: Whoa, please.

MR. WHITE: Sorry, sir.

Speaker's Ruling Naming a Member

THE SPEAKER: On at least one occasion today the chair stood up and reminded all members to read *Beauchesne*, if my memory serves me correct, 484. It had to do with naming members by their name. Now, I don't know why the chair would stand up and caution members and then realize that members don't read it, so I'm going to try again.

MR. WHITE: I misspoke myself, sir. It's just that that particular region has been treated so well by the local MLA there for so long that his name has become so synonymous with Dunvegan that I often make the mistake. It shan't happen again, sir.

4:10

Debate Continued

MR. WHITE: Back to where I was, in the midst of this glowing chastisement of the government policy. You can imagine having a local municipality come together, either a collection of them or individually, and sending out: there's some economic development. The first thing they get by talking to someone in Mississauga or in San Francisco, enticing them to build a plant or build something in their town or village or city for that matter, is a fellow saying: "Well, haven't we heard you've had difficulty keeping the lights on? How can I have a plant running from 4 till 8 at night?" What kind of economic development is that? None at all, sir.

Someone was mentioning earlier that this is akin to putting communities together in a forced way like land use planning was done. As a matter of fact, some of those members in this Chamber this member came to know first by that association. It was a forced fit, but at least the fit was land based. You could actually decide that, yes, in a region there was some reason for some co-operation and co-ordination, but this government, poof, did away with them because it was another level of government that they simply did not require.

Now, in that vein the members of this Assembly will be considering this bill, and I for one feel it is money and time poorly spent. The local municipalities are very, very able to provide the kind of organization they need for local economic development. All they need is the money to do so. Give them some points on tax, give them some points on fuel tax, cut back the area that is taken on their current property tax bill by reason of the school tax, cut that back, any one of the above, and they will do very fine, thank you very much.

Thank you for your time and consideration, members.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to congratulate the Member for Athabasca-Wabasca for his concern over economic development and the work that he does, quite frankly, on the Northern Alberta Development Council and the representation he provides from northern Alberta to the table.

In speaking, though, to Bill 217, I have to come at it from a different side, I'm afraid. Alberta Economic Development and the Alberta Economic Development Authority supports the efforts to assist communities to become self-reliant and to develop economic development plans on their own throughout the province. We believe very strongly that barriers must come down and that we must build on strengths and relationships throughout our communities.

In fact, there are several models that are already in place throughout the province that demonstrate that this can in fact happen. One of them is the east-central Alberta regional development authority, which is a group of 29 communities that have come together to form a relationship or intercommunity participation for development plans. This is a very good alliance that has been formed by the communities with the assistance of and support on ideas and frameworking by Economic Development and the AEDA people.

There's another alliance that has recently been formed in the northeastern part of the province. This is the initiative called the northeast Alberta information hub, which again links 37 communities together. This was done because they realize that by working in partnership and tearing down barriers, they are able to pull together strengths to have an effect on development within their own regions.

Other relationships are starting to come forward. In fact, there are many that are linking together through the business information system that is available in the central area. I haven't got a current update, but the last I looked at the business information system that was available, there were over 10,000 small businesses registered on the system so that potential investors or developers would have easy access to information of small businesses within that regional area. I applaud them for doing that.

Our government has been supportive, Mr. Speaker, of regions coming together and working together and, in particular, of municipalities tearing down barriers. In fact, under the new Municipal Government Act there is a provision that allows communities to work together through the creation of intermunicipal service agencies. I think this has been very effective and is being utilized throughout the province.

Insofar as the Alberta Economic Development Authority is concerned, they have a subcommittee that deals specifically with community development. The Self-reliant Communities Committee was formed specifically to facilitate communities in building on their local strengths and resources and to participate in the economic growth throughout the province.

This subcommittee developed a work plan that was aimed at assisting communities and regions with the development of a common vision and an economic development business plan. In co-operation and conjunction with the Department of Economic Development, AEDA helped hold regional meetings throughout communities and the regions to help them with development of their visions and their actual business plans. This process was very, very successful. The committee, through AEDA, also works with other departments of government to help increase community awareness of economic activities, to help communities reduce overlap and duplication, and to facilitate co-operation between communities and regions in promoting what's called the Alberta advantage.

I would not be in favour of a legislative approach to this program of bringing regions together, because I believe it would lessen the self-reliance component that we believe is very important throughout this province and in fact probably the commitment that the committee has gained from the regions to encourage the reduction of overlap and duplication.

The other difficulty I have, Mr. Speaker, with Bill 217 is that it creates responsibilities that go beyond the scope of the Alberta Economic Development Authority's mandate. This authority, I'll remind members, is a volunteer group of people who have come together to provide advice to this government on economic development. They do not set policy. They do not have legislative authority to go in on a spending mode. So I would ask hon. members to consider that greatly, that this goes well beyond the mandate of the Alberta Economic Development Authority.

They themselves have expressed some strong reservations about this proposal due to the potential change that would occur with their responsibilities and their mandate. Clearly, they have been most effective in providing advice and guidance through these regions, and I would not like to disturb that. I would also remind members again that this is a volunteer group of people that have come together and donated their time and efforts to help with economic development.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask hon. members to rethink this, because quite clearly the concept of regional development is occurring today. It is represented in a number of areas in the province. What we need to do, more importantly, is to go out and encourage more of our municipalities to join together so that they can build on their strengths, develop their regions, tear down the barriers between governments that are within the province, and come forward with a business plan that promotes their very region. I think that would be the success of economic development throughout the province, not something that is legislated by this House, because I think that would take away from the commitment of the volunteers in the local communities, who clearly are onside to seeing their communities develop and provide a successful future.

So I'd ask hon. members to reconsider their position and not support Bill 217, because I believe we have the elements in place today. Thank you.

4:20

MS LEIBOVICI: I, too, concur with the minister's deductions, maybe for slightly different reasons, that this bill is not supportable. One of the areas that the minister did touch upon was the fact that the Alberta Economic Development Authority is a volunteer organization. Given the fact that it is a volunteer organization, it appears that the bill that's put forward in the form of Bill 217 actually would tread on the toes of the Ministry of Economic Development.

The Alberta Economic Development Authority was not something that I supported in terms of being established within the

province of Alberta. It was not something that I felt had the ability to do the actions that are outlined in the act itself. When we look at the fact that the act itself is restricting the ability of the Alberta Economic Development Authority to engage in certain activities because it depends on whether or not it has "sufficient funds in its budget" -- and that's a quote out of the Alberta Economic Development Authority Act -- the reality is that it's a toothless tiger that can be used on occasion to substantiate some of the actions of this government and to appear to be at arm's length from this government.

When we look at Bill 217, one of the requirements for the setting up of the regional councils, I believe they're being called, is that the approval has to come from the executive of the Alberta Economic Development Authority. So when we're looking at one act and we're looking at an amending act, which is the bill that's put forward by the private member, we need to look at those two pieces of legislation in conjunction with each other. One of the realities -- and I don't know if the member is aware -- is that the executive of the regional economic development authority has never met, so it would be exceedingly difficult for that executive to then turn around and determine who the regional council should be.

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul indicated that he felt what would happen as a result of the establishment of these regional councils is that there would be a unified economic plan for Alberta and that without them that plan would not exist. My question to that member would be: what is the role, then, of the Department of Economic Development? In fact, if we were to look for a single cause of hindering of economic development in Alberta, it would be the former Minister of Economic Development, who cut that department in half, who cut their resources in half and ensured that economic development was not an issue of foremost importance in this particular government.

When we look again at what are the duties, if we call them that, of these regional councils, we see that we have once again unelected officials, much like we have with our health councils, who are going to be developing and undertaking a variety of action plans. Again, one of the things that this government did was defund the regional planning commissions, who had elected members on them, who in fact could represent and perhaps have some impact on the action plans of a particular area, and who vanished overnight.

There's a lack of commitment with regards to the democratic process of this government. We saw that this afternoon with the vote on citizens' initiatives. We've seen that with the fact that this government refuses to elect members to the regional health authorities. Now we see once again a devolution of responsibility from the executive in terms of the Ministry of Economic Development with the proposal from a private member -- and I acknowledge that the minister did not agree with that proposal -- to devolve the powers of the ministry to yet another unappointed body to make decisions that in fact are decisions that probably are best left in the hands of elected members and the responsibilities they stand for in terms of their elections.

The question as to why it's a private member's bill. I did have a question on that. I thought that was one way of getting around the inadequacies of the Alberta Economic Development Authority Amendment Act, and that's why the side door was opened, to bring it through as a private member's bill, obviously with the minister not agreeing. That is not the case. I would be much more interested in opening up the Alberta Economic Development Authority Act to see whether or not we should in fact have that as a piece of standing legislation within this province.

My other comment is that if in effect this were to become a body that were to have any impact on planning in its communities,

then funding of course would have to be allocated to that. Again, that should only come through the ministry. That should not come through a source or through fund-raising. I wonder if the member was thinking the regional councils should avail themselves of VLTs in order to fund-raise for their activities. How were they going to fund themselves? Perhaps the member could address that issue as well.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 217, the Alberta Economic Development Authority Amendment Act. I believe that the intent of Bill 217 is tremendous and that there is great merit in the regional economic development councils proposed by the bill. This is something that should be given close consideration because there are many positive aspects to it.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the regional economic development framework would be to provide a single multisector development framework incremental to other programs of either the federal or provincial government. This framework would focus on economic development in Alberta. It would help improve the competitiveness of the province by encouraging investment in key business development such as trade, technology, infrastructure, human resources, value-added manufacturing, and entrepreneurship. Measures taken would be designed to expand Alberta's economic base and foster employment growth in long-term productive jobs.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Madam Speaker, the primary function of the regional economic development councils would be to integrate and co-ordinate the activities of all local development groups as well as undertaking activities itself to accomplish common objectives within the regions. Ultimately, this is so that communities may build competitiveness and capitalize on opportunities.

Madam Speaker, this approach to community economic development encourages groups of communities to work in partnership with the private, co-operative, and public sectors to achieve the shared goals of partnerships: co-ordination, organizational stability, and service in regional trading areas.

Madam Speaker, most issues do not stop at municipal boundaries nor can their solutions be answered by any one government. The establishment of regional economic development councils would make it much easier for neighbouring communities to address mutual concerns at the appropriate level: the regional level.

Growth is the single most powerful force propelling economic and social change in the province of Alberta, and one of the biggest challenges facing many communities today is how to gain control over and co-ordinate rapid growth. Indeed, Madam Speaker, growth and development is beneficial to our communities. This is especially the case if it is channeled in a way that respects what is important to all Albertans' quality of life.

The challenge of growth requires concerted actions by all levels of government, the business community, interest groups, and individuals. Establishing a regional economic development council would give municipalities the benefit of a solid foundation, one from which they could address municipal and regional relationships. Such a council would also set out the basis of firmer links between local governments and provincial agencies.

4:30

Madam Speaker, there are some key objectives that the regional

economic development councils would be able to contribute towards; for example, expansion of the economic base, key sector investment, sustainable job growth, investment opportunities, development of enterprises, private-sector investment, promotion of public- and private-sector co-operation, human resource development, complementing of other government programs, and minimizing the administrative costs. These are all important objectives that this bill addresses. One of the key concepts or messages that Bill 217 provides is the co-ordination of services among local governments in concert with the provincial level. This notion has great merit. It is a notion that was advocated during the Growth Summit, and it is one that this government takes very seriously.

Madam Speaker, governments must always look at new ways of doing things, ways of improving on efficiencies and service delivery. We can never stop looking for new ways of providing governance and services, and I am proud to say that this government is a leader in reforming government in a fiscally sustainable manner. Indeed, we are blessed with tremendous growth in this province. Growth brings great opportunities and also enormous challenges. It is and will continue to be this government's policy to meet the challenges of growth in a well-thought-out plan. Such an example is the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, the challenges of growth and prosperity do not only fall on the shoulders of the provincial government but other levels of government as well. A cogent argument advocated by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca is for municipalities to work together in looking for new efficiencies and co-ordination amongst each other in order to facilitate and sustain economic development. This would be achieved with the participation of the provincial government.

Madam Speaker, to get to the heart of the matter, we are talking about partnerships, partnerships which provide an overall strategy for economic development within regions, thereby providing a co-ordinated effort among municipalities and streamlining regulations, making it more easy to conduct and, more importantly, to plan for development and business.

Madam Speaker, I commend the hon. member for sponsoring this bill, and I support his intentions and the principle of the bill. Thank you.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to just take a few minutes this afternoon to speak on the merits of the legislation that's before us and try to place before the House some of the serious considerations that have been presented to us. May I say at the outset that I have difficulty in supporting this legislation, basically because of the legalized impact it has to an initiative that really does belong in the private sector and requires a fair degree of flexibility in order to be effective.

First of all, let me begin by identifying to all of you my support for the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca. There is no doubt that he has taken a great deal of time to work with his constituency and look at some models to address some very serious issues that he feels are important. The region that he represents has a great deal of natural resources in it. It also has tremendous opportunity for economic development on the tourism side as well. It is a chapter of our province that needs to be explored and visited and traveled. It's one where industry is welcome, where the ability to work, to study, to live, and to enjoy the environment is a very high priority in the community. So I can clearly understand why the hon. member would have taken such trouble to go and craft a piece of legislation that in his mind would

support not only his own region but the recognition that a co-ordinated approach to economic development is something this Assembly should be supporting. I have to tell you that many communities share the same economic diversity and a range of social and educational issues that would also merit co-ordinated attempts. I think earlier in the debate in the House we talked about Prosperity South, which was a major initiative and very successful in bringing together stakeholders from across the province to represent a region in the south-central part of this province.

Having said that, it's very difficult for me, since the election in 1993, to look at a model which has such confinements to it at a time when we really do want all the flexibility we can get, one that also, quite frankly, binds not only this government but all levels of government in order to participate in a process that currently works very well in the private sector and in the partnerships that were mentioned earlier.

Let's just speak for a minute about the fact that the Alberta Economic Development Authority, an initiative that is a flagship model that our Premier has endorsed and supported, by its very flexibility and innovation has been a significant part of the Alberta advantage. There is not a jurisdiction in the province that's been able, in an organized fashion, to co-ordinate and draw on the expertise not only of education, industry, business, environment, transportation, and human resources and apply them together in a model which promotes the economic well-being of the province. That economic well-being, as we know from the Growth Summit, includes a variety and range of issues, not the least of which is people development and not the least of which is our tourism industry.

Having said that, with the diversity of representation on that volunteer board and the strategic support from government and the private sector, it seems somewhat inappropriate to turn around a few short years later and suggest that we have to confine their work in such a legislative fashion. I'm sure that the hon. member had absolutely no intent, when he brought this forward, to cast aspersions on the successful work of the current AEDA board. I'm certain that that is stating the obvious. But we do have an authority who's charged with the responsibility to meet obligations that do respect the Alberta economy in all its facets and, as has been mentioned, to do this with a voluntary component. So you have not only their own ability and interests in their particular aspect of business, industry, education, or human resources working on our behalf, but you also have that incredible strength of our volunteer sector, which provides us with so much guidance and leadership.

As was mentioned earlier by the Minister of Economic Development, they don't set policy. They are there in an advisory capacity, and that advice throughout the province has different implications and at different times, with respect to budget and government policy, has a different role to play. To legislate such an authority within our municipalities would, I think, limit our flexibility to respond as we might need to and also I think change the aspect of what good advice might be for the overall economic development of the province.

I do want to really reaffirm that this is a model that is working. It has work to do. There is no doubt that we have yet to maximize business relationships, educational and social contacts throughout the world. We have put ourselves on the map as a province and as an economy from a fiscal point of view. We have established trading links and partnerships that are without precedent, but we do have a lot of work to do. We can cite our own interprovincial trade barriers as an example of where we have not even completed the necessary homework to be effective within our own domain.

I would like to encourage and endorse the AEDA board to continue working in that area. That's the kind of advice we need to hear.

We have a network of partnerships that combine our chambers of commerce. Our postsecondary institutions are often involved in our trade missions, looking not only for student arrangements to enhance the workforce and the faculty development of the institutions but also to look at the business contacts that can spin off in our technology developments and trade and other components. I think the work they do on our behalf in that area must be maximized, and by narrowing and limiting the input of such organizations as the chambers of commerce or postsecondary institutions and AEDA and tying this to a municipal government model might be counterproductive.

4:40

I also wanted to talk a little bit about some of the successes that we have had in what I call community planning partnerships. I mentioned earlier the initiative of Prosperity South, which we talked about, but I have to take the opportunity to respect and acknowledge the initiative that we have at work right now in Calgary-Currie with the closure of CFB Calgary. I know it's been discussed a few times, and I feel it's very important as a member for that area to acknowledge the work that's done in the community on behalf of regional planning. This is a model of flexibility, of co-operation. It is sponsored by the three levels of government -- the federal government, the province of Alberta, and the city of Calgary -- with dollars attached to develop and model a public forum for discussion, for showcasing the issues of the community, for developing a public planning process that respects a whole range of issues. We are aware that our Minister of Community Development has worked in conjunction with the various levels of government on historic sites issues and has moved to designate and recognize a significant part of the history of Alberta. We also are aware of the fact that in our military tradition the Museum of the Regiments, which is a national treasure that we have in our community, is also looking to partner most appropriately with a whole range of resources in order to expand their service.

The city of Calgary has some very, very significant issues in front of it which are part of their municipal responsibilities but which they are dealing with in conjunction with private-sector partnerships. I could cite a few of them that were raised at the community meeting last evening. We're looking at the ability to maximize our infrastructure, our transportation network. We're looking at trying to ensure that we have employment opportunities that respect the residential component of the community but also bring diversity of workplace and employment siting within the city of Calgary to minimize issues around transportation and to maximize the use of infrastructure. The city and its planning team have been very effective in identifying some of those priorities. In addition to that, we have the economic resource of the institution of Mount Royal College, a very strong and stable element of that community, looking for its future role in the overall planning process.

The community itself has named a number of citizens from the various community associations. In addition to that, the federal government has appointees to this board, and the chairman is the distinguished lawyer from the city of Calgary, John Moreau. The reason I go into the detail about this is that what their initiative is going to allow us to do is to maximize a range of solutions, not just the economic advantage, not just the tourism potential, not just one segment -- i.e., history or educational, the college -- but to look at what would be the most appropriate community development model for that area as it fits in with the city grid that

surrounds it. That's been well thought through.

We have already taken the east side of the Crowchild development forward to city council for approval. We have been very successful in minimizing appeals, recognizing the permit component that still has to be dealt with. But the interesting part of such a broad range of community participation is that when you get to the municipal government level, you have your aldermen inside, you have your community well informed, you've got the partnerships in place that are appropriate, and basically you have, through a volunteer component and an interactive awareness model, the opportunity to be more cost-effective and deliver very, very good planning on economic initiatives. I encourage and will continue to share with my colleague from Athabasca-Wabasca that these are some of the . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a) I would now have to invite the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca to close debate.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just for clarification and for records, the Member for Edmonton-Calder and also, I believe, Edmonton-Meadowlark were concerned about the funding arrangements. The proposal is to have a funding arrangement breakdown where the province would provide one-third of the funding, the municipality would provide one-third, and private industry in the region would provide one-third. The targeted amount of each project could be in the range of \$100,000.

There would be a minimum of five municipalities to form a regional economic development council. I believe in addition to providing a short-term economic action plan and a long-term economic action plan, which would in turn be filed with the provincial Economic Development Authority, the opportunity for municipalities to start working together is there, and that's one key part I think we're missing. We have over 360 municipalities out there now for 3 million people in Alberta. I'll give you a good example. In my constituency the county of Athabasca has 12,000 in population. It has 11 municipalities, 11 mayors for 12,000 people. Can we continue to operate that way in the future? I feel a bill of this nature will pull municipalities like that together, start them working together, and eventually they may form a regional government, which in turn would have better planning and a better handle on issues, with less costs for the taxpayers.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd just like to again thank the researchers for their work on this bill. They spent a lot of time doing research and putting this stuff together, and I'd like to thank them. Sometimes we don't recognize our research people, and I think we should more.

The other thing I'd like to mention also is that we did meet with members of the Edmonton Economic Development Authority today, with about four or five northern MLAs, and they saw the value of a process of this nature. They think it's something they would definitely support.

With that, Madam Speaker, in closing I'd like to call the question on Bill 217.

[Motion lost]

Bill 218 Environmental Bill of Rights

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to speak to Bill 218, the Environmental Bill of Rights, this afternoon. There is no doubt that every Albertan has the right to a healthy environment that is protected for future generations. This bill gives us an environmental commissioner which will be in the province and which will help ensure that the government is in fact doing its job in environmental protection.

There are six major objectives that this bill achieves, Madam Speaker. One is that it gives Albertans the individual right to work to protect the environment. It requires government business plans to be compatible with the principles of sustainable development and protection of the environment. It creates an environmental commissioner within the Auditor General's office who will receive and respond to petitions, conduct inquiries, and evaluate government and government agencies with respect to sustainable development and environmental protection. There are many precedents for this having occurred in other jurisdictions in Canada. We think the time for it to be in Alberta is now. It gives Albertans the right to defend the environment in the courts. Finally, it provides whistle-blower protection, which is very important for people who have environmental concerns and who want to see some action taken on them.

To prepare this bill, Madam Speaker, we did consult a number of stakeholders. We went to the office of the Auditor General, and while the Auditor General himself is not in a position to endorse any particular legislation, he did think this role would be appropriate to be taken care of within his office. In fact, he and his staff were most helpful in making suggestions which were considered in drafting this bill. In discussions with his staff there is no doubt that they felt there was a need for this kind of a role within government right now, and it certainly is not met within his current mandate.

We consulted with David McRobert, in-house counsel for the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, and he provided very helpful comments and drafting assistance in putting together this bill. Brian Emmett, the federal environmental commissioner, supplied information from his office. Martha Kostuch, an environmentalist here in the province, reviewed the first draft of this bill. Of course, we have to thank our own Parliamentary Counsel, Shannon Dean, for her assistance in seeing that this bill got drafted in a way that is easy, I believe, Madam Speaker, for this Chamber to pass.

4:50

The objective of this bill is concerned with the rights of Albertans to a healthy environment that is managed in an ecologically sustainable manner. While the government has the prime responsibility for protecting the environment, this bill also gives Albertans the right to take action. When we took a look at the various kinds of legislation that we could bring forward to this floor, Madam Speaker, the one that spoke out in volumes was the need for Albertans to take action, because in fact in many cases this government is not. People can do this by bringing issues to the attention of the newly created environmental commissioner, or they can go through the courts to see that remedies are taken when they see that there has been inaction or misaction on behalf of the government or anyone else.

This bill protects health, Madam Speaker, and in times of rising costs when we see a government that is solely driven by the bottom line, I think all initiatives that effectively prevent the need for health care in this province and that take preventive action now are worthy of merit by this legislation and should be taken under serious consideration in this case not only by the Environmental Protection minister but by the Health minister. I'm hoping that he will make some comments on this bill.

This bill also protects and conserves the environment. This includes preventing damage by contaminants, protecting and conserving water, protecting the biodiversity of species, including genetic diversity, and ecologically sensitive areas. In fact, all of those areas are at risk in this province at this time. This bill ensures that government policies are based on the principles of sustainable development and protection of the environment, not just in Environmental Protection but in all departments, Madam Speaker. The principles of sustainable development and protection of the environment must be incorporated in ministry business plans in this act. We note, then, that sustainable development is defined as "ecologically sustainable development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the earth to meet the needs of future generations." We see this now in the minister's business plans, but in fact it isn't actually happening in this province. Once again the government does one thing but performs in another direction, so this bill brings forth some accountability in that regard. It definitely increases government accountability for environmental decision-makers. With environmental decision-making, if we've ever seen a time in this province that it's required, we've experienced it in the past three years in this Legislature.

This bill establishes the office of environmental commissioner within the office of the Auditor General, something that is certainly within his mandate. It enables Albertans to more easily participate in government decisions affecting the environment. The public can have input on proposed legislation, regulations, policy, and codes of practice in any department if they have a significant effect on the environment. And it's very important to do that, Madam Speaker, because what we're finding is that regulations are put forward in other departments that do have a significant environmental impact, and then in fact they are not considered from an environmental filter and we sometimes have considerable damage being done. Sometimes, as we have seen this week in the Legislature, a proposal is made by another ministry and the Environmental Protection minister does not look at the environmental consequences and passes it. With this kind of legislation, that couldn't happen. [interjection] Because the Alberta government has failed to adequately protect the natural environment in this province.

Government policies need to pay more attention to sustainable development and environmental protection. The public needs to be able to take action to get the government to improve its protection of the environment. Several other Canadian jurisdictions have recognized the need for an environmental bill of rights and an environmental commissioner and have acted on this. We think Alberta should be following this lead. An environmental commissioner can examine all government departments to determine whether government is pursuing sustainable development and protection of the environment. This bill gives Albertans the right to sue anybody that is contaminating or degrading the environment, and we think that is something very important for them to be concerned about.

Now, I know, Madam Speaker, that we're going to see some government speakers rise on this, and they're going to raise some objections. I'd like to address those early on, when we're speaking to why the principle of this bill is so necessary. They might say that we don't need any further bureaucracy in this province. If they talk about the Environmental Appeal Board, which we have now to review objections to approval for projects that affect the environment, the Natural Resources Conservation Board, and the Energy and Utilities Board, we see that these boards won't fit the need in this province, because these boards only examine new projects or they only look at projects where an approval has already been granted. None of these boards examine whether the government itself is doing an adequate job of

protecting the environment or managing it in an ecologically sustainable manner. They do not provide adequate resources for the public to protect the environment and do not provide whistle-blower protection.

Now we're seeing increasing numbers of documents coming out of the minister's own department concerned about what is happening in the environment in this province. Those are the people who are hands-on, Madam Speaker, and they know that there are problems in this department. Right now there is no mechanism in this province to address those needs. There are many people who are out in the community who are also seeing things that are very alarming to them. Right now there is no existing way for them to address those matters in a sustainable manner. So we think this bill is needed.

We may also hear from the government that the Auditor General already investigates issues relating to the environment. Up to a point this is true, but at present the Auditor General can only investigate if there are financial implications. There is no process for the public to formally ask him to investigate an issue, and this is very narrow compared with the issues and recommendations of the federal environmental commissioner, many of which we see modeled in this bill. In fact, there are many situations of environmental contamination or possible contamination that don't have immediate financial implications, so they simply are not in the Auditor General's mandate to investigate. Yet if we don't take care of those now, we will have financial implications or health implications down the road, or we may see a situation where we lose protected environment. This is happening all the time with the way this minister has interpreted the special places project, which is really a joke in this province as it stands.

MR. SMITH: A joke?

MS CARLSON: It is absolutely a joke. Look at all of the people who have pulled out of that process because it does not do what it was originally mandated to do. [interjection]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Labour, you do not have the floor. Go ahead, Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: I'm sure that he can stand and speak if he wants to.

We were speaking about what happens if the Auditor General takes on this expanded role. It isn't a new role for him; it's just an expanded role, well within his mandate. We may hear the government say that they don't want a new bureaucracy, but the fact is that if the government did its job well, there would not be many complaints to investigate and few staff would be required. So the bureaucracy only increases if the government doesn't do its job. Really, in that regard they should have nothing to worry about if they think they're doing a good job. It's only if there are things to investigate, matters where there are shortcomings in this area where they're going to need -- if the government is worried about increased bureaucracy, all they have to do is do their job in the first place, Madam Speaker, and we're not going to see any need for that. We're hoping that they'll consider that when they're taking a look at this.

We may hear the minister stand up and say that the Ombudsman now has the power to investigate complaints about the workings of government, which is true. However, we feel that modeling our legislation after the federal environmental commissioner is most effective, more effective than going through the Ombudsman because it provides a systematic framework for improving

sustainability with regard to environmental protection in all departments, which is very important. This way you just don't wait for people to bring complaints. The department itself can further investigations if they see a need. We've seen a couple of cases in this province where the Auditor General would have liked to have investigated further but didn't have the mandate to do so.

We think we can easily address the kinds of concerns that we're going to hear the minister and other members of government bring up, because there is a very necessary need right now for this to happen. In fact, it's a need that's addressed by a number of people within the department of the Auditor General himself.

5:00

We think that people on both sides of the House should support this bill now because government records show that it is necessary. The Alberta government has failed to adequately protect the environment in many areas, and I'm going to run through some of those examples to put a context for this bill in terms of why we felt that this was the bill to pursue at this time with regard to the environment.

We see that measurements show high levels of PCBs in red-backed voles near Swan Hills. Those are the small mouse-like animals that live in the area. From 1993 we've seen an increase in PCB contamination there. The problem with seeing the contamination in these voles is that they are then eaten by predatory animals who subsequently make their way up the food chain. PCBs don't disappear, Madam Speaker; they accumulate. What happens is that by the time they get eaten by us, they have very high concentrations of PCBs, and PCBs have significant health consequences not only for the people who eat them but for future generations of Albertans.

We have seen this government repeatedly fail to take action about major leaks up there, and there appears to be ongoing contamination, Madam Speaker. That raises some concerns. Now, if we had this kind of a bill in place, when the government doesn't take aggressive action, people in the community could bring forward aggressive action so that this problem would have to be dealt with, and we wouldn't end up looking like the Great Lakes did in Ontario in the early '70s, when we saw dead lakes, when we saw human contamination that resulted in a number of health concerns that are ongoing concerns.

We've seen the government fail to require an environmental impact assessment into the Sunpine logging road despite the strong objections to the proposed line of the road from the public. When we found out, when we FOIPed information from the environmental staff itself, we saw agricultural practices and sewage disposals that have caused considerable pollution of many rivers and streams in this province. The Environmental Protection department has rarely taken action in this regard.

We see flaring of oilfield gases causing considerable air pollution due to incomplete combustion as well as contributing to total greenhouse gas emissions, but the government has only recently started to take action in this regard. If we had an availability for the public to initiate action, we would see these concerns addressed much, much sooner.

We've seen the government privatize the management of many provincial parks and recreation areas without public consultation on the broad policy change. Consultation has only taken place on some of the individual parks, and that's created a problem in this province. If there has been one major concern that I have heard from Albertans this year, it has been this privatization of parks and some of the deterioration that we've seen and concerns about the roadside closures. This is an issue that is dear to the hearts of many Albertans. Many people have tried to get the govern-

ment to pay attention on this one, Madam Speaker, but it hasn't happened. If we had this kind of initiative, then definitely the government would have to come up to the mark a lot sooner, and we would have a lot more recommendations coming from the Auditor General's department that could specifically deal with issues that are important to Albertans.

We've seen the government fail to protect the full range of biological diversity in this province. There are lots of examples of that. One is the management plans for areas nominated under special places programs. These are mainly determined by local committees rather than by provincial committees that have an overall perspective of provincial needs. There is insufficient protection of areas in boreal forests and concerns over allocation of timber supplies. There is failure to protect water quality from contamination from agricultural and municipal sources.

One of the problems with the special places program is that when it suits the minister's needs to listen to the local communities, he does, but when it doesn't suit his needs in terms of economic facilitation, he doesn't listen to the local communities. So we have a whole bunch of different sets of rules across this province when we're talking about nominating lands under the special places program, and none of them are consistent. People don't know . . . [interjection] You know this problem inside out. You know this problem inside out, and you refuse to address it, because you have a mandate for special places programs.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

MS CARLSON: Of course, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We are in second reading of this bill, so please remember that.

MS CARLSON: No problem. I do remember that. And it's very important that . . .

MR. DICKSON: Ignore the provocation.

MS CARLSON: But it's hard because I'm speaking on behalf of many thousands of Albertans who are very concerned about what's happened in the special places program. [interjection]

MR. WHITE: Well, they don't even bother talking to you because they know. They talk to us.

MS CARLSON: Yes, that's true.

So when we speak to the principle of this bill, it's very important in principle that we have a government who treats every special place in this province equally. When they don't, then there needs to be some sort of remedy for individuals to access in order to see that the government does its job properly. We just don't have that, Madam Speaker, and that's why we need this bill.

We see that with this bill each department will in the future be required to consider sustainable management of resources and protection of the environment in drawing up their business plans. I'd like to give you some examples of what would happen there.

Alberta Energy could be expected to examine the effects of its policies on the use of fossil fuels versus renewable energy. This

would include examining the extent to which financial incentives to the fossil fuel industry distort the playing field for renewables.

Now, the principle of this is very important. If we put an environmental protection filter on every department in this government, we would have a province that everyone in the world would want to live in. Right now, all we see in this province with this government is the filter of the bottom line, how it is that they can cut costs and bring in surplus budgets every year. That isn't sustainable in the long term, Madam Speaker, and that's the kind of issue that we need to address here. In principle it's very important to take a look at every department through an environmental filter because that is the only way that we sustain an environment that is going to be promising for our children and their children to grow up in, and that's really our job in here, to make sure that we are providing a life for future generations in this province that is first-class in the world, and that isn't happening right now. It isn't happening in this province right now.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Yes, Madam Speaker. They're provoking me, though, I have to tell you. I know that the minister wants to stand up and speak to this.

The fact is that we have a lot of environmental problems in this province, more than one or two. There are literally thousands of them, and it's eroding the quality of life that we all have in this province, and the people who are particularly going to pay the price are our children. We have to address these concerns now.

If we would see this bill as a filter that each department would have to look at, then we could see that in Energy they would have to examine the contribution of the policies that they make for energy efficiency in this province. That doesn't happen right now. We used to have a mandate to do that with the energy efficiency branch, but it's been disbanded, so there's nobody taking a look at that kind of a filter.

We could see that Alberta Energy would be expected to have specific targets for the reduction of air emissions.

Madam Speaker, given the time I would like to move to adjourn debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, does the Assembly agree?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? It is carried.

MRS. NELSON: Madam Speaker, I move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn the House until 8 o'clock this evening, when we return in Committee of Supply.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:10 p.m.]