

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, November 30, 1998** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 98/11/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Give us the strength to labour diligently, the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've two petitions to present today. The first one is signed by 762 Calgarians, and it petitions the Assembly to

urge the government of Alberta to recognize the disadvantaged position of renters in the current Calgary apartment market, and take steps to ensure that safe, affordable accommodation is available to every Albertan.

The second petition, sir, is one signed by 160 Albertans urging the government of Alberta "not to pass Bill 37, the Health Statutes Amendment Act, 1998," and presumably any subsequent iterations of that bill.

Thank you.

head: Notices of Motions

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hereby give notice that today after question period pursuant to Standing Order 30 I will move that the ordinary business of the Assembly be adjourned to deal with the following matter of urgent and pressing necessity, the urgent need for this Assembly to ratify the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, prior to the adjournment of the fall sitting, or failing this, to provide direction to the standing policy committee of the government caucus as to how to proceed with such ratification.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MR. WOLOSZYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the 1997-98 annual report of the Consulting Engineers of Alberta. Additional copies are available from my office for members who might request one.

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, I have a bit of an unusual tabling today. As you'll remember, last week we had Mr. Tom Droog of Spitz sunflower seeds, who I introduced. There was a very gentle, subtle suggestion from the chair that he provide some product. Being a concerned southern Albertan and sensitive, as I am, he picked up on that gentle, subtle suggestion, and I'm proud to be able to table today in the House a package for each member of the House consisting of Spitz sunflower seeds, which is one of Tom's

products, Old West beef jerky, a package of cashews, and a package of chocolate-covered almonds, all produced by Spitz sunflower seeds. Tom has particularly requested that I table these particular sunflower seeds for the two members of the NDs; they're called spicy and hot. I'm very pleased to be able to do this. As well, there's a spittoon in every package, and Tom was suggesting that with your permission and this good spittoon, members might be able to use these in the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. minister, but I think that in terms of the decorum of the House, we'll avoid using the Spitz in here. Rather than have the material distributed to all members in the House, I think we'll just have them stored in the reference room just behind the chair, and you might be able to pick them up a little later today.

MR. DAY: Returning to the mundane, Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling the annual report of the Alberta Municipal Financing Corporation, also the annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1998, for the Alberta Securities Commission. I might add that the commission continues to set the trend across the country in terms of providing the types of assurances to investors related to harmonization of regulation across the country.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to table five copies of a series of letters from customers, parents, guardians, staff, and board members of Lethbridge Family Services. These letters express a real concern that wage parity doesn't exist in the social work area between those that are working for the private agencies and the government agencies.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of a letter sent to me by Roland and Raymond Rivard. They are hog producers in the Legal area. They're asking that the government help the pork producers right now as they find themselves in a disaster situation.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a Buffet World claims report as put out by the Employment Standards Code. This indicates just how far and how difficult it is for workers to receive their fair wages from this Alberta Labour department.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to table a chronology of the five pieces of correspondence between the Conservative federal government of the time and the government of Alberta with respect to implementation of the UN convention on the rights of the child. This tabling shows clearly that the government of Canada responded to Alberta's request, and the ball has been for the last seven years in Alberta's court.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of a freedom of information and privacy request to Alberta Treasury and copies of correspondence asking for an extension as of October 9 and then an extension again as of November 19 on that request.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is copies of correspondence and other documents from Economic Development and Tourism regarding the Three Sisters development in the Banff-Canmore corridor.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce three local presidents of the Alberta Teachers' Association who are visiting the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. I would ask them to rise and be recognized by the House as I name their names. The first is Maurice Lacroix, who is with Edmonton separate, Kurt Moench with the Calgary public teachers, and Peter McNab with the Edmonton public teachers.

THE SPEAKER: Did the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore have an introduction today?

MR. STEVENS: I don't see the 125 people that are supposed to be here, Mr. Speaker, so I think I'll wait.

head: Oral Question Period

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

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 26 the Premier said that he was waiting for the federal government to put a qualification on the UN convention on the rights of the child. He said that Alberta had a notation relative to some of the more contentious clauses. If one examines the exchange of correspondence in 1991, however, it's clear that Alberta asked Ottawa for some clarification and received that clarification more than seven years ago. My questions, therefore, are to the Premier. Since the government received the assurance of the federal government, why have they done nothing on this matter for seven years?

1:40

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have all the correspondence here, and there were two reservations that were put on the declaration by the federal government.

MRS. SLOAN: Why didn't you table them?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has tabled it.

The reservations pertain to article 21 and article 37, Mr. Speaker. The concerns that we have relate to articles 13 and 15 primarily and perhaps some others. In my meeting with the Archbishop Desmond Tutu I indicated that there are Albertans who still have reservations relative to these articles, and if the federal government will simply note the reservations of Alberta, then we might consider signing the declaration.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, since nobody else is having a problem, not UN High Commissioner Mary Robinson, not members of your own caucus, not Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, and not the 170 countries from around the world that have already signed the declaration, what is this government's problem?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition would read the list of countries, there are some on that list who do not by any stretch of the imagination have a commendable record relative to the rights of children or human rights in general.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Archbishop Tutu I quote from a newspaper article in the *Edmonton Journal* where he says:

"I am not here in Alberta to hold an inquisition," said Tutu, adding that his impression is that the Klein government is moving in "the right direction."

And indeed we are.

I would ask the Liberal party to help us with this. Help us with this. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo argues that the interpretation by the federal government is a correct interpretation. There are some in this province, many I would suggest, who have concerns. Help us with this, and help us put pressure on the federal government to address these concerns.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my question is: will the Premier show some real leadership on this issue and simply support the ratification of the convention today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in the two tabled letters from then federal and intergovernmental affairs minister Jim Horsman to first the secretary of state for external affairs, Joe Clark, and his successor, the secretary of state for external affairs, Barbara McDougall, he indicated quite clearly that we would be willing to sign on to the declaration if those concerns were noted. Now help us with this.

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

Education Funding

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, my second set of questions is also to the Premier. While the government predicts a quarter billion dollar surplus, 40 percent of our school boards in Alberta record an operating deficit. My question is: why?

MR. KLEIN: I really don't have a precise answer as to why, but I read an interesting article in I think it was the *Edmonton Sun*, an editorial on the comment page about school trustees giving themselves a raise while at the same time complaining about a deficit.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the situation as it affects school boards, I'll have the hon. Minister of Education reply.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a question that was raised by Mr. Moench, the president of the ATA in Calgary, with Mr. McNab in our meetings we held this morning, and their question was: what will the province be doing with respect to deficits of school boards? It would appear that about 26 of the 60 school boards in the province are running small deficits, and when I say small, the point is that expressed in dollar terms this is not insignificant amounts of money. For example, in Edmonton public it would appear that the deficit they projected this time is roughly

\$11 million to \$12 million. Expressed as a percentage of their global budgets, which in the case of Edmonton public is in the range of about a half a billion dollars -- we should expect that school boards from time to time will come in with small surpluses or small deficits. We don't expect them to be able to budget their dollars down to the penny each and every year.

Mr. Speaker, under our current funding framework, money is given to school boards under the condition that there's no deficit financing, so the question really is with respect not so much to what the province will do as it is to: what is it that school boards will do to deal with their deficit? I express confidence in school boards in Edmonton and Calgary and throughout the province that they will deal with these issues.

Mr. Speaker, from the province's point of view we will always be looking at pressure points. We are reinvesting money in education. From 1996 through the year 2000 education funding will go up by about \$550 million, a 15 percent increase. That is much greater than the rate of inflation and the rate of growth of the number of students combined. No one would suggest that a half a billion dollars is not significant reinvestment.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, teachers and parents certainly know what's going on with those deficits.

The question is: when is there going to be some leadership from this government so that schools can focus on learning instead of generating funds?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I'm going to have the hon. minister supplement my answer, but there has been significant reinvestment in education. It goes to the heart of what the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition talks about. It goes to the fundamentals of learning: early intervention, the restoration of dollars for ECS, to address special-needs children, to address the problems of sparsity and distance in the remote areas.

To answer in more detail I'll call on the hon. minister again.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker. Two points in this regard really. I wish to reiterate comments that have been made in this House previously. The first comment that I'd like to make, and I'd like to quote this: I recognize that teachers cannot do their job adequately without support, but we can no longer expect that there will be an unlimited supply of money. Those aren't my words; they're the words of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, a second quotation was with respect to fund-raising.

There are extra charges for things like field trips and rental plans for some textbooks. I don't believe that the fee structure is unreasonable in the minds of Albertans, and I do not intend to make a direction to school boards that they no longer implement those fees.

Mr. Speaker, there is a point where we have to say: how much is enough? Again, from 1996 through to the current year over \$300 million in reinvestment and an additional \$180 million between now and the year 2000, and that's at a minimum, taking into account things like growth in classroom numbers and such. It is appropriate to ask the question, you know: how much is enough? We believe there's an appropriate amount of money being reinvested in education.

Mr. Speaker, we're constantly speaking with parents, meeting with school boards, meeting with our partners in education from the ATA, and we're always looking at those pressure points that need additional funds. One important area particularly is with respect to special-needs students. That area of funding went up

by 30 percent per capita, a significant amount. An area like English as a Second Language funding: teachers have identified that as a pressure point. We've responded by putting more money into English as a Second Language. Our early literacy programs are another example where reinvestment has provided a very, very positive benefit for students in Alberta.

Speaker's Ruling

Oral Question Period Practices

THE SPEAKER: As always, hon. members, if you are prepared to quote from paper in front of you, would you please have the courtesy of tabling that particular information for all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. member, may I ask for just a bit more brevity with respect to some of your responses?

To the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Alberta, would you kindly button it?

1:50

Education Funding

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, there certainly was enough to give a 20 percent increase to private schools.

My question to the Premier is: will the Premier review public school funding as he did private school funding last year?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. minister has indicated that our commitment to public education is a firm commitment. Our commitment also to those parents who want to have an alternative and pay for that alternative is quite firm as well.

I hate to, you know, go back in history, but I will.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Table it. Table it.

MR. KLEIN: No. I'll just read the quote. I think it was in *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker. This is when the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was Minister of Education. It says:

While I'm on my feet . . .

I'm quoting her. This is from *Hansard*.

. . . I would like to also point out that the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding gave a strong endorsement for public support of private schools in this province. I don't quite understand the position taken by the parties opposite that there be no public support for private education.

Nancy Betkowski, page 1243, *Hansard*, August 21, 1986.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I wish to supplement with respect to the review the funding framework is currently undergoing. I also note that during her tenure as Minister of Education the Leader of the Opposition saw an increase in private school funding of nearly 9 percent. We note that. We accept the hon. member's suggestion that there should be a review of the funding framework, Mr. Speaker. That's ongoing right now.

With respect to the amount of money reinvested, I note that there are about 4 percent of children who are in the private school system because that is a parental choice that their parents make but that 98 percent of the funding in the province of Alberta goes to supporting public schools. So there is strong support for public education. I again note that it should not be considered insignificant that the amount of money reinvested in public education has also been in double digits.

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

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Premier. The Official Opposition wants to help the Premier in his quest to get to the bottom of the West Edmonton Mall refinancing. However, time after time, whether it's the Premier's office or the ministry of economic development, or now even the Treasury Department, they claim that the documents either don't exist or that they cannot be released to the public. My first question is: given that the Treasury Department has acknowledged the Official Opposition's freedom of information request, thus confirming that they have documents, why is the department refusing to release them?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, obviously that FOIP request went through the FOIP co-ordinator in Treasury, and I'll have the hon. Treasurer respond.

MR. DAY: There's been no refusal, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I guess the question really is: why would the Treasury Department even have a hundred pages of documents if the government wasn't involved in the refinancing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as far as I know ATB reported and still does report to Treasury, but I'll have the hon. Treasurer respond.

MR. DAY: Again, Mr. Speaker, the only records that we have related to requests have to do with correspondence back and forth with the individual who works for the finance critic. We have indicated to him in one instance that I know of that some information which has been requested has to go through the usual FOIP process, supported by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, of checking with third parties.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, just as an example, one example alone -- and there are other examples too -- in that particular request we informed not only by telephone but in writing on September 3 the individual who does the work, I might suggest most of the work, for the finance critic. We kept him involved on September 16 of progress with a particular request, again on September 16 more information related to the progress of the request, again on September 30 more correspondence back to him informing of progress, another one on October 9, another one on October 17, and another one on November 19.

That's an example of one that I'm familiar with, and if the member has others that she feels are not rapid enough, then by all means, let us know, and we'll try and grease the rails and keep things moving with the usual speed that we do. That's just one example of how we keep the opposition informed of progress.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier override the Treasury Department and release these documents in their entirety to Albertans, please?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the intricacies of the FOIP request through Treasury. Again I'll have the hon. Treasurer respond.

MR. DAY: Again, nobody on this side of the House would overrule the FOIP Act, which lays out very clearly what the process is. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the member of the Liberal opposition may want to from time to time consult with the person who does the work for the finance critic, because that

person has also been informed that it appears that all of this has cleared. It appears that the process indeed has cleared. As a matter of fact, we had indicated that it may not be until December 15 when the information would be released, but in fact we have also informed them that it could be before December 15. So I would suggest a little communication. [interjections] I listened carefully while she spoke, and I would have expected the same courtesy. However, it's not forthcoming.

I would encourage communication back and forth between the critic and the main critic, and maybe it could forestall some of these questions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the NDP opposition, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Health Care System

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twice already this year, in the spring and in the fall, it's clear that the government misread the mood of Albertans, who clearly do not want private, for-profit hospitals. I remind you: two strikes and you're getting pretty close to that third one when you're out. My question to the Premier is this: why should Albertans trust this government and, in particular, its Health minister to unilaterally decide who gets appointed to the so-called blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37, what the panel does, and with whom it's supposed to consult?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the panel has yet to be selected. I would ask the hon. leader of the NDs to send over some suggestions. She might be surprised.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to consider that an invitation from the Premier and ask him in response if that means that he's open to members of each caucus in this Assembly appointing the members of that panel or at the very least allowing the council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons to appoint that panel.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I haven't discussed in detail the process for appointing these people other than to give the broad direction to the hon. Minister of Health that this should be an independent, impartial panel to do a thorough examination of the principles and clauses relative to Bill 37.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, would the Premier, then, commit now that no current or former MLA would be on such a panel and quell people's concerns that former Justice Minister Brian Evans would be the chair of such a panel?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is the first I've heard of that suggestion, but Mr. Evans is a good person, you know. I'm sort of confused by the hon. member's question. In one breath she's talking about an all-party committee, and in the next breath she's saying that current and former MLAs shouldn't be involved. Now, what is it?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

2:00 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (continued)

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this past weekend Edmonton successfully hosted the world at our 50th anniversary

conference of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights with delegations from 34 different countries, with luminaries such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, UN High Commissioner Mary Robinson, Supreme Court of Canada Justice Antonio Lamer, and others. I personally felt humbled and privileged to be directly involved, and I want to thank all the members from all three caucuses for being present at the main program on Friday night. Now, I know that Alberta has indicated that it supports the spirit of the UN convention on the rights of the child but with reservations regarding specific articles of that convention. My first question is to the hon. Premier. Mr. Premier, will you please explain exactly what would have to occur in order for Alberta to support this convention on children's rights? Exactly what has to take place?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what would have to occur is really the federal government acknowledging the concerns of many Albertans relative to articles 13 and 15. I explained the situation to Archbishop Tutu. I explained to him also that the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall is now taking this through a standing policy committee, and we will revisit the issue as a caucus. But fundamental to revisiting the issue is an undertaking on the part of the federal government to address our concerns as they relate specifically to articles 13 and 15 and perhaps some other articles.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Thank you also for attending Friday night along with so many others.

My first supplemental is to the Minister of Community Development. Since the Premier and the hon. minister have both indicated publicly that in practical terms Alberta is compliant with the UN convention, can she explain which aspects of this convention have already been implemented by our province?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that Alberta has implemented all -- all -- of the areas of the convention and implemented all of the principles of the convention. We rather think that what's most important is action, not empty words and rhetoric.

To be specific, let me tell you that Alberta human rights legislation protects children against discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, and many other grounds. We have publicly funded education available for every child in this province. We offer an array of health services to every child in this province, unparalleled in almost every other country in this world.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are implementing all of the principles of the UN convention on the rights of the child. We are continuing to suggest that our reservations in those areas of parental responsibility are valid, and we asked the federal government to respect that.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, and thanks to that minister for attending our conference as well. [interjections] We were all there. Those who care were there.

My final question is to the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services. Since his ministry has responsibility for welfare and safety issues regarding our children, can this minister explain what he is currently doing to protect our children and their rights in this province of Alberta?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would certainly love to respond to the hon. member. First of all, I would like to put a little bit more information on the UN convention on the rights of the child. In May of 1994 the government of Canada in accordance with its reporting obligations under the convention submitted to the United Nations the first report of Canada addressing compliance with the convention. The report indicates that the legislation and practices of Alberta conform to

the convention.

I would ask the hon. member to look at points 435 to 522 of that May 1994 document that the government of Canada put in. What it states is that Alberta is in complete compliance with the UN convention on the rights of the child.

Freedom of Information

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner's report on the Premier's office's failure to comply with the freedom of information law reminds me of the game of hide-and-seek. Albertans are tired of the game, and they want to know why the Premier's number one law isn't being respected. My questions are to the Premier. Who in the Premier's office is responsible for staff not being properly trained in freedom of information procedure?

MR. KLEIN: Well, no one is responsible for staff not being properly trained, Mr. Speaker. I mean, we just don't have a director in charge of staff not being properly trained. It's a strange, strange question.

MR. SAPERS: My mother taught me there were only strange answers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Premier, who's responsible for underfunding and understaffing records management in the Premier's office?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I do not have a director of understaffing and underfunding.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier explain the government's policy defining and his understanding of negligence as it's set out in the freedom of information act?

Speaker's Ruling Seeking Opinions

THE SPEAKER: The question period is a time frame for seeking information, not for seeking opinions and other things associated with that.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the . . . [interjections] I'm sorry.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Mr. Speaker, there was a lot of noise coming from the front bench. The question specifically said, "Would he explain the government's policy," which, I believe, is in order in question period. Would the Premier explain the government's policy defining an understanding as set out . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. member. That is not what the chair heard originally. We'll use a little indulgence today to deal with the policy.

Mr. Premier, if you wish.

Freedom of Information (continued)

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the policy of the government is to comply with the legislation as it relates to freedom of information and protection of privacy. That is the policy.

Mr. Speaker, relative to his second question, that is subjective. Could the hon. member provide his opinion and his thoughts as to what constitutes negligence, you know, aside from being a Liberal? I don't know.

THE SPEAKER: I gather, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, we've dealt with that. There's no point of order at the conclusion of question period.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Student Finance

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. In my constituency there are many people who are eager to advance their education and career. However, student debt is a big issue. So what is the minister doing to help students who must borrow money to further their education?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we've identified student debt as one of the main issues in this ministry, and one of the steps we have taken to try to assist students is we've brought in the Alberta opportunity bursary. This bursary is meant to be a partnership between not only the government but also the institutions and, through them, partners that they might have in either the private sector or the public sector or the so-called third sector where they would raise moneys and then we the government would match these dollars to attempt to provide opportunities for financially needy students to gain access to our postsecondary institutions.

The Alberta opportunity bursary is relatively new, but I think all members here in the House would join me in certainly congratulating the way the institutions have undertaken to raise money and to help needy students in Alberta who are qualified and are motivated then to attend our postsecondary system.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental question is also to the minister. How many students does the program help and with how much?

2:10

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've set aside for this year and the next two years in our budget \$15 million, but again I want to indicate to members of this House and of course to the viewers and taxpayers of this province that it's meant to be a matching program. In other words, the institutions along with their partners would raise dollars, and then we would help to match those. We're hoping through this program that we could help as many as 15,000 students per year. I might remind the Speaker and members here in the House that we're really talking about access to postsecondary, so we're talking about assistance in the first and second years of a postsecondary education.

MR. CAO: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my last question is also to the minister. Could the minister tell us: what is the current status of this program?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that as we're speaking here today, we've helped more than 12,000 students through our system. Now, I think what is particularly unique and perhaps particularly efficient is that we didn't have to set up any sort of bureaucracy in order to handle this opportunity bursary program. What we've done is simply made it an adjunct to the Students Finance Board that's already there. So as a student qualifies for student debt funding, then we would look to see whether or not the opportunity bursary would kick in.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that it's provided some tremendous opportunities for people to get involved now in the postsecondary system. For an example, last Friday at noon in the city of

Calgary we had the Bow Valley College put on just an excellent luncheon. The Premier was there. We had the Provincial Treasurer there to assist as well. Through the auction and the matching, we actually were able to raise \$200,000 for needy students. A week ago Friday in the city that I represent -- in fact certainly the Member for Lethbridge-East would be aware of this as well -- the Lethbridge Community College went through a wine auction and with the matching raised \$280,000 for needy students.

So, Mr. Speaker, this program is good news. I'm sure the opposition members would join me in congratulating all of the institutions for the fine work that they're doing as we provide funds for needy students in Alberta.

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

Architectural Contracts

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A fair and transparent government would put all projects and contracts out to tender. My questions are to the minister of public works. Can the minister explain why the firm of Burgener LaChapelle Kilpatrick was given two contracts worth more than \$230,000 without tender?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the specifics, and if she sends them over, I'll get her a more detailed answer. However, what I would like to say is the process we have with architectural firms, as I went through last year, is that a good number of the contracts are given on a pro rata basis. This is with the architects themselves, who like the process. It does not needlessly waste their time and efforts in not having successful projects. So we have a list and we divvy it up amongst them.

With respect to this particular firm I did indicate last year that this would come up again this year. They have had an ongoing project with the department, a legitimate one for the past three or four years, and you'll see that there'll be more moneys expended next year to this same firm.

MS LEIBOVICI: Can the minister explain who gets on this list and who makes up the list?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Oh, yes, Mr. Speaker. Just about every architectural firm in the province has had the benefit of being a part of our process. All they have to do is be prequalified. The process is very simple, straightforward, and endorsed by the Alberta Association of Architects.

MS LEIBOVICI: Can the minister, then, provide the Assembly with the complete list of the preferred suppliers to ensure that there are no winners and losers being picked by this government?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, if you wish, I could provide that. But I would tell you that depending upon what the projects are, we would have varying firms on at any given time. Certainly we'd provide the list of firms we do business with, if they don't want to go to Public Accounts where it's all open and transparent. Quite frankly, any other specific questions that the hon. member would like to ask about any specific project I'd be more than pleased to answer.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod, following by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Rural Electrification Associations

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many rural Albertans get their electricity through local co-operatives. These co-operatives are known as rural electrification associations or REAs. There are 125 REAs, which provide more than 40,000 members with electricity in this province. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What does restructuring of the electrical industry mean for REAs in southwest Alberta?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the REAs, as has been stated, have had a long-standing heritage in the province of Alberta, bringing power to each and every Albertan throughout the heartland and the vastness of this province. What restructuring means is a dramatic change, an historical change from what were previously called franchises, because they owned the wire business and they delivered the power to their customer under almost a monopoly basis. Now they will have to make some serious changes and challenges within those REAs. Some have already done that by grouping together in larger groups to look at the way this new restructuring is going. Others still have that challenge ahead.

The change is that they no longer can be both a wire provider and the provider of power under the one structure. They must get into the retail business if they want to supply their customers with power. They can be wire owners and deliver the power on those wires to their customers, but they can't monopolize the choice that their customers will have going into 2001.

MR. COUTTS: My first supplemental, then, to the same minister is: how will REA members benefit from customer choice?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, historically the members have been the owners of the REAs, which own the wires and have also, some of them, contracted for power to deliver to their customers, who are their members. Some of them have just contracted through Alberta Power or TransAlta to bring that power in. Now, going into 2001, each member of an REA or the customer thereof will have choice. They can choose a stable rate option to stay with their REA and the electricity provider till 2006, or they can go to the open market and find themselves exposed to a wonder of new services to be provided.

When the meters are changed on each installation at their farms or houses or even in the cities, you will have a thing called convergence offered to you. You will have a choice to manipulate and work your own power utilization for a price so that you can make money by having day and night rates, shutting your power off when you're given peak load challenges. You'll also be able to get certain services, such as all of your bills paid through that meter from gas, electricity, TV, telephone, Internet services, services to the commodity exchanges. Retailers will come along and provide to all those customers a choice in a whole cross-section of services. Now as an REA member -- and I may allude to that; I don't know what your last question is -- they can still be owners of the wire, but they no longer can control the members in that REA under a monopoly so that they can only purchase their services from one person.

MR. COUTTS: My final question then: what opportunities do REAs have in a new, competitive environment?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, that's the toughest question asked here today, because indeed some REAs that are small and at the end of the line probably don't have a lot of choices. Some of them have

200 members, and they're running a wire business and operation and maintenance. Unless they join with other REAs or groups of them, which some of them have done in southern Alberta, their critical mass will expose them to competition that perhaps they cannot afford.

2:20

The choices they have outside of that is to split into two companies, one a wire business and owner of wires, and they can do operation and maintenance of those or contract that out. The other is to become retailers. They can form a separate company and go to the power pool and purchase power and bring it back and give that choice to their members or to the customer, not on a monopoly basis mind you, but still they have the opportunity to form two companies.

Now, we have said that it probably will stand them well to join together and get their critical mass. I know that a group of REAs in southern Alberta has 10,000 customers and is looking at forming a retail company separate from their wire business and going into business. There are others, such as the one I belonged to a few years ago -- we sold our business. We sold it to Alberta Power. We're out of the wire business. We buy our power just like everybody else. I might say that it didn't affect my life a great deal, but that's a choice they have.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the time exchanged for that set of questions was five minutes. The time exchanged for the second set of questions was nine minutes.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Group Homes Registry

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Calgary's submission to the Alberta Growth Summit pointed out that provincial off-loading has led to an increase in the number of group homes, which remain unregulated because the municipalities have neither the means nor the jurisdictional responsibility. My question today is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: when will the minister take responsibility and establish minimum standards and regulations for group homes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to refer that question to my colleague the Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The group home issue has been something that the departments of Community Development and social services have been looking at for approximately the past year. What we have decided to do is come forward with a voluntary registry of group homes to determine where they are and where they can be registered. We are also in the process of bringing forward some standards for group homes as to what they will be operating under. From what I understand, that talk is taking place between the three or four departments involved, and hopefully we'll have a resolution to that issue as soon as possible.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, then, I'll return for my first supplemental to the minister of social services. Seeing that we've been waiting for a year, two years for you to compile a list, when are we going to have a list so Calgary, Lethbridge, Edmonton, and every other city will have it?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would give that one

over to the Minister of Community Development, whose department is looking after examining the list of group homes.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, we are making very good progress in the development of the voluntary registry. It would appear from the number of group homes or places of residence that accommodate other persons in them that there is a great deal of co-operation from that group and their desire to, in fact, do this.

Mr. Speaker, it is not as simple as the hon. member would make it, because many of us may have in our home a resident who is there, and the question is, "If I have my mother-in-law or a member of my family staying in my home, am I a part of this voluntary registry?"

We want to make sure that this registry really does accomplish what it is intended to do. It will be developed with great care and with attention, as will the standards that the Minister of Family and Social Services is dealing with. In the meantime, if there are any areas of concern in that area, we do have an opportunity for people to bring them forward. Frankly, my office is not inundated with calls of concern in this area. They seem to be very pleased with the progress we're making.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, my last question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. When will the minister admit that this government's downloading of \$416 million is the reason municipalities now are considering fees for group homes?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the whole intent behind the Municipal Government Act is in fact to provide an opportunity for municipalities to be yet more and more in the driver's seat. In terms of fee allocation and distributing additional responsibility to municipalities in the area of group homes, I'll defer to the minister of social services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During our last two answers I heard numerous catcalls from the opposition. One of the criticisms that has taken place in government is that government departments have not been co-operating with each other. As we go around the province, we hear that government departments should not operate in the silos like they were when the hon. Leader of the Opposition was in government but instead they should co-operate. This is a perfect example of that, where you have Municipal Affairs working with us, you have my department, and you have the Community Development department working to provide a voluntary registry. We're working to set up standards for these group homes.

Mr. Speaker, I found the whole idea of group homes very interesting. First of all, group homes were not done in an effort to save money. Group homes were established to provide a better level of care. The hon. member from the opposition who has asked the question I'm sure does not want these people put into institutions. They're much better off in the community, and that is what we're doing. We feel that the best way to treat these people is to put them into group homes. Unfortunately, the opposition doesn't want to do that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Education Funding (continued)

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For a government

that prides itself on balancing its books and getting out of debt, I am quite frustrated that there's a tolerance for allowing our school boards to run deficits and debts. I am even more disturbed that we are able to find short-term bridge financing for our hog producers, leaving our school children disadvantaged. My question is to the Minister of Education. Given that the CBE report identifies that the restructuring in the Calgary school board has not yet demonstrated financial effectiveness, how much longer will the minister tolerate debt loads of those school boards without intervening on behalf of the students?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I believe there is a strong role for local autonomy, and that's the reason we have locally elected school board trustees. Most recently, Friday past I met with the new chair of the Calgary board of education and a number of the superintendents, including the chief superintendent. I believe that the Calgary board of education is genuinely committed to ensuring that this deficit will be dealt with, and as I indicated in my answers to the Leader of the Opposition earlier today, money is given to school boards on the condition that there is no deficit financing. What boards have to do, including not just the Calgary board but other boards in the province -- they only can budget deficits if they have sufficient surpluses from previous years to offset those deficits. I believe that the Calgary board of education is on the right track.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Given that 83 percent of all instructional funding for the CBE is utilized in contracts and that there is no increase in funding, the only place that their shortfall will occur is in the classroom. How will the minister ensure that there is no deficit effect in the classroom?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated at the outset, I've met with the CBE trustees, and I believe they are committed, just as the government is, to dealing with their deficits and ensuring that their plan will ensure that students receive a solid education in classrooms in the city of Calgary.

2:30

MRS. BURGNER: My final question, Mr. Speaker: given that our two larger boards, close to 40 percent of our students, are running a debt or deficit, why will this minister not recognize an urban need and respond in the same way other ministries have responded to health care pressures and other crises in funding for our larger urban centres?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, almost word for word that is the same question that was asked of me by the ATA this morning. I think we have to note that there is a two-pronged process: first of all, a review of the funding framework to ensure that the manner in which the pie is divided is appropriate, secondly, the subject of reinvestment in education; that is to say, the question of the size of the pie. We have provided significant reinvestment in those areas where there have been pressure points. But, you know, as the hon. member knows, the budget-building process is ongoing at this time, and we're always keen on looking at pressure points where we can afford sustainable programs in the future.

Speaker's Ruling Brevity in Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today we had 11 sets of questions, and that's a bit higher than average. However, there are still six hon. members who have indicated their desire to pursue a question today. So perhaps tomorrow we might just ask

the responders to the questions for just a little more brevity with respect to this so we can get to the remaining questions.

In 30 seconds from now we will deal with Recognitions, and there are six hon. members. We'll go in this order: the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, then the hon. Member for Fort McMurray. As I indicated, we'll be doing that in 30 seconds from now.

In the meantime, I'm going to ask the Minister of Education if he wished to do an introduction.

The tabling that came from the hon. minister of science, research and information technology is available in the room right behind me but only to be picked up by hon. members. One of the pages is going to co-ordinate this mission.

So 30 seconds from now for Recognitions.

The hon. Minister of Education.

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Member for Vegreville-Viking, the hon. minister of agriculture, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 15 grade 10 students from St. Mary's high school in Vegreville. They are accompanied by Colleen Fjeldheim and Peter Varga, and a parent, Judy Dohaniuk. I ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Recognitions

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

National Heritage Fair

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The national Heritage Fair will be held in Edmonton July 12 to 19, 1999. The fair is hosted by the Charles R. Bronfman Foundation, well known for its *Heritage Minutes* videos seen on television and at the cinema. Held in a different Canadian city every year, the national Heritage Fair brings together 165 students from across Canada for a week of educational and fun activities celebrating their heritage. As the 1999 provincial host Alberta will have a chance to showcase its heritage as well.

I'd like to thank Museums Alberta and the Social Studies Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association for organizing annual provincial heritage fairs in five Alberta regions and for their work in securing this national event for Edmonton.

Thank you.

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

Noel Leis

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to recognize Noel Leis, a constituent of Edmonton-Meadowlark who was recently nominated for the first ever minister's senior service award. This award recognizes those who help make a difference in the lives of seniors. For many years Mr. Leis has been, and continues to be, an active advocate on behalf of seniors and residents of continuing care facilities. As a resident of Capital Care Lynwood and president of the Capital

Care Lynwood Resident/Family Committee he demonstrates on a daily basis leadership and dedication to the betterment of all seniors. Also on a regular basis he keeps me apprised of the needs of seniors within my constituency.

Mr. Leis is an exceptional individual who, despite his physical limitations, has devoted his life to enhancing the quality of life for seniors, especially those in long-term care. He is providing an outstanding public service as seniors in long-term care facilities can be extremely vulnerable and reticent to advocate for themselves. Alberta seniors have and will continue to benefit from Mr. Leis's efforts on their behalf.

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

2001 World Triathlon Championships

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As everyone in this Assembly heard, on November 19 we learned that Edmonton had won its bid to host the 2001 World Track and Field Championships. This is the second international sporting event our capital city has been chosen to host for that summer. Earlier this year the International Triathlon Union announced that it had selected Edmonton to host the 2001 World Triathlon Championships on August 18 and 19, thanks to a strong bid led by St. Albertan Terry McEvoy of the Alberta Triathlon Association.

Triathlon is an international sport that is growing in popularity. Edmonton is expected to host a series of national and international events leading up to the 2001 championships, beginning with the 1999 Canadian National Triathlon Championships next July. Like the upcoming track and field championships and the many other international events Alberta has hosted, Mr. Speaker, this event will give our province the chance to welcome the world and shine on the world stage.

Thank you.

Swimming World Cup

MRS. SLOAN: The world cup swimming championships held at the newly renovated Kinsmen Sports Centre drew over 200 athletes from 22 countries this past weekend. Particular mention must be made of the efforts of Jim Wheatley and Cheryl Gibson, the organizing committee, Swim Alberta, Swim Canada, the city of Edmonton, hundreds of volunteers, and Kinsmen Centre staff who provided support.

It is particularly a pleasure to recognize the outstanding efforts of Alberta athletes who swam from the Edmonton Keyano, Edmonton Olympian, University of Calgary, and the Cascade Swim Club.

These Athletes include Colleen Nuk, Melissa Dyson, Kelly O'Toole, Shauna McNally, Jenny Scott, Jan Pelechytik, Brian Eddy, Michael Knight, Morgan Knabe, Russell Patrick, Collin Sood, Chris Renaud, Jason Brockman, Miki Matinovic, Joe Melton, Bo Simpson, Scott Flood, Curtis Myden, Ron Voordouw, Andrea Moody, Kerry Miles, Lauren VanOosten, Penny Heynes, Tara Sloan, Andrea Schwartz, Joanne Malar, Michelle MacWhirter, Josh Ballum, Bart Ujack, Julia Wright, Daniel Ducheck, Christen Johnson, Etienne Caron, Cara Lachmuth, Krista Morrison, Allison Zwarich, Chris Hibberd and Michael Power, and Mark Ritchie.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Eryn Bulmer

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to congratulate Eryn Bulmer of Calgary, who was recently named Canada's female aquatic athlete of the year by the Aquatic Federation of Canada. This is the second year in a row that Eryn has received this award.

As young as the age of 22 Eryn had already demonstrated outstanding diving skill. Ms Bulmer holds several diving titles, has broken long-standing diving records, and represented Canada in the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur this past summer. She shows much talent and promise for a successful diving career. Eryn lives and trains in Calgary and shares this honour with Canada's male aquatic athlete of the year, who is another Albertan.

Sport in this province has earned a reputation for excellence, and Eryn Bulmer is a perfect example of the calibre of athletes that represent Alberta. She is a role model for young Albertans and yet another raised-in-Alberta athlete of whom we can all be proud. I extend my congratulations to Ms Bulmer and wish her much success in her future endeavours.

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

Volunteer Effort

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Alberta and especially in Edmonton we have hosted a number of events. The IAVE conference on volunteers, the World Swimming Cup '98, the International Conference on Human Rights celebrating 50 years of the UN declaration. Today in Edmonton is the Meet the North conference, and now we look forward to hosting the 2001 World Track and Field Championship and the 2001 World Triathlon Championship. None of these would be possible without volunteers. So today I would like to recognize and salute the volunteers of Alberta. Volunteers come out for these high-profile events but also for arts groups, amateur sports, recreational activities, for people-serving agencies in health and social services, youth activities, seniors' activities like Meals on Wheels, and the list goes on and on. I'd also like to recognize the efforts of Volunteer Alberta for advertising, recruiting, and promoting volunteers. As an Albertan and as a legislator I am deeply grateful for the contribution of volunteers and proud of the skills and dedication they show.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

2:40

Mark Versfeld

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'd like to extend my congratulations to a young Albertan, Mark Versfeld, a resident of my constituency of Fort McMurray who was recently named by the Aquatic Federation of Canada male athlete of the year. Mark is an outstanding swimmer who has been a great source of pride to our province and to our city of Fort McMurray. He was a member of Team Alberta at the Canada Games. He was nationally and internationally recognized this past summer when he won two gold medals at the Commonwealth Games.

Mark is a dynamic 22 year old who is an inspiration to Alberta's youth. He's committed to his sport and manages to find time also to attend university. His family has a long Olympic history with inspiration from his mother and father. He's currently training for the Pan-Am Games in Winnipeg and the

Olympic Summer Games in Sydney, Australia, and on behalf of all Albertans we wish him the best of luck in these competitions.

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

Point of Order

Offending the Practices of the Assembly

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today under Standing Order 23(1): "introduces any matter in debate which offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly." I am making particular reference to the words uttered by the Treasurer after a question was put by the Leader of the Official Opposition to the Premier regarding the response from Alberta Treasury to a freedom of information and privacy request.

The Treasurer said two things when he stood to supplement the Premier's answer. The first thing that he said was that there was a normal process involved, which is not correct, and that lack of accuracy I believe violates the Standing Order. The other thing the Treasurer said, which is even more troubling because it's just out and out wrong, is that there was no refusal to release documents.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today at the appropriate point in the Routine I tabled a series of documents, and I identified them as a series of documents relating to a freedom of information and privacy request for access to information from the Official Opposition to Alberta Treasury. Included in that package of information are several letters: one dated October 9, 1998, from Alberta Treasury to the Liberal caucus; another is a fee estimate from Treasury; another is a letter dated November 19 from Treasury to the Liberal caucus; as well as an exchange of correspondence with the Privacy Commissioner. I will be referring to these documents.

Mr. Speaker, on the point where the Treasurer told the Assembly that there was no refusal to release the information. In particular, what I am asking you is to direct the Treasurer to stand and clarify. I would refer you to the letter dated November 19, 1998, to a researcher in the Alberta Liberal caucus regarding the freedom of information and privacy request at issue. I will paraphrase from the letter. It says: "After considering this issue, the Head has decided not to release the non-third party records as requested." That is, the head has decided not to release.

MR. DAY: As requested.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I hear the Treasurer making noise over there. He'll have his chance to speak in a minute.

So I would ask the Treasurer to apologize to the House for giving them that false information and to acknowledge, in fact, that his own FOIPP co-ordinator wrote on November 19 that a refusal in fact has been given from his office.

The other point that I would like your ruling and direction on -- and perhaps we can get the Treasurer to stop making these inaccurate and, I might say, misleading interventions in the Assembly -- is his assertion that this constitutes a normal process. Mr. Speaker, the normal process is that when a department wants an extension under the freedom of information law, they do two things. They notify the requesting party; they also notify the commissioner. The commissioner will then pass along the notification of the request of an extension. That's a very clear process under the act, and it has been our experience that the Treasury Department has followed that process up until now, with this particular request that is the subject of the question.

Alberta Treasury has refused not once but twice to comply in a timely fashion with the request and has failed to provide the notice letter, or at the very least no notice letter has been received

from the Information and Privacy Commissioner by the applicant for the information. This is a clear departure from standard practice and procedure and in no way reflects the normal course of events that the Treasurer was trying to tell the House transpired in relation to this request.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is not simply a matter of a difference of opinion regarding facts or events. This is not just a difference of interpretation. This is where the Treasurer has either been misinformed himself and has repeated his misinformation or he has chosen to not be accurate in his telling of his tale. So I think it's about time that that kind of response stop in this Assembly, particularly on something as important as a potential breach of the freedom of information and privacy law of this province.

MR. DAY: I feel badly standing up, because in fact there's no point of order. It's the member across the way, his ongoing time -- every time he gets burned, which is daily, he stands up to try and weasel his way out of the burning that he took. Mr. Speaker, I might add that if we're talking about information . . . [interjection] You know, I was quiet. I listened the whole time except for the one little time where I said that there was, in fact, the request as reviewed.

Mr. Speaker, what the member released to the media -- this is quite fascinating if he's talking about truthfulness. He released one -- I repeat -- one letter from Treasury to the person who does his work for him, one letter in his Liberal press release which he just sent out, which he always just rushes to deliver to my desk. There is one letter that he included from Treasury to the person who does the work for him. There is one letter, one copy. I was open enough to reveal and discuss several letters. There is a series of letters on this issue which shows that the request, as it was given, was not going to be immediately fulfilled and within the regulations under FOIP would be fulfilled and, I believe, as I stand here, has been fulfilled. He was informed of all of this. He tabled to the media one letter. I suggest that if he's talking about truth, he should tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Mr. Speaker, in my view this is not even a point of order, and I'm sorry I gave in to the temptation to get dragged into this, but if he's going to be purporting to tell the truth, he should tell the whole truth.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in the last few minutes I've been able to get the original copy of the Blues, as much as I possibly could, and listened and read it again in terms of the exchange.

I listened very attentively to the exchange between the hon. Opposition House Leader and the hon. Provincial Treasurer. If you look at section 23, there are a number of points of order that people raise. Please remember that our Standing Orders basically deal with accusations that one member might make about another member essentially in their conduct or something else. I listened very attentively to the exchange that went on. It seemed to be a discussion of where a particular FOIP request is or where it is not. Well, probably towards the end of some of these comments there were some suggestions about, quote, telling the truth. It didn't really quite come yet to the point of an accusation that another member did not tell the truth. So that sort of keeps us away from most of what's in section 23.

This sounds to me that it's rather a significant -- and maybe "significant" is even too strong of a term -- dispute between members over facts. Perhaps both members might just want to read all their mail, and tomorrow let's see if there's another statement with respect to this or not, to see exactly what the factual relationship is but also a continuation of the question

period, which did not allow six members to have a chance to have a question today.

So it seems that it doesn't really fall under section 23 for a point of order.

head: Request for Emergency Debate

2:50 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, you did submit in due time according to the rules a Standing Order 30 request, and I would now invite you to come forward with your arguments on the basis of urgency of debate.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to argue that the motion that I've circulated to members of the Assembly is of both an urgent and a pressing nature and that it should be debated in the House forthwith. I have three or four main reasons. First, there's confusion in the statements coming from the government side with respect to whether or not all the articles of the convention on the rights of the child are being respected and implemented. Today the Minister of Community Development asserted that all of those articles are being respected and implemented, whereas the Premier in answer to my questions last week specifically singled out two of the articles, 13 and 15, and said that those are not acceptable to this government. So there's a contradiction here that needs to be clarified once and for all, clarified for all members of this House and for the people of Alberta.

The second reason, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the fact that the Premier has publicly announced that a standing committee of the Conservative caucus will begin consideration of this matter forthwith. In fact, he has named a member of his caucus, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, to have the prime responsibility of guiding the discussion within that standing committee on this matter.

Now, given the degree of confusion and contradictory positions taken by this government, that I've just drawn attention to, it is imperative that this Assembly have the opportunity to give direction to that standing committee as to what these articles say and are about so that the discussion can take place properly.

The last argument about the urgency and pressing nature of my motion, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the fact that we have been informed that young workers in this province, young workers particularly under 18, are subject to abuse and economic exploitation by some unscrupulous employers, such as Buffet World. That matter hit the national news today. At 11 o'clock on *Dayside* I was watching that news being now broadcast to the whole nation. Any day that passes without these under-18 young people enjoying the protection of article 32 of the rights of the child convention is a day that does injustice to these young people, who need the protection of the law. The Minister of Labour doesn't seem to have the political will to enforce those rights that workers normally should enjoy.

So these are three fundamental and basic reasons on the basis of which I think the consideration of my motion is both of a pressing and urgent nature. Thank you.

MR. DICKSON: On the question of urgency there are just a couple of observations I wanted to make. The first one is that it was just on Friday, November 20, that there had been a rally in Calgary for National Child Day, where you had a large number of representatives of different Calgary groups, including the Children's Advocate, a member of the Conservative caucus, this

MLA representing the city of Calgary. There is a lot of momentum around this issue that I think has to be addressed.

We're a Chamber that is supposed to be accountable and responsible, and that means responding to issues that are of widespread concern to the men and women we represent. Now, I'd just say that I'm supporting the urgent need to debate implementation of the convention rather than ratification, but it seems to me that there's been some misleading information that will injure and prejudice our reputation as a fair and tolerant community, to wit the suggestion that's been put forward, an embarrassing suggestion that somehow this province is waiting for the federal government to do something.

In the chronology I tabled earlier today, it makes it clear that since December of 1991 Alberta has had the assurance and the comfort that they sought by specific letter from the Conservative government of the day, and they've sat there for practically seven years not moving on it. This is an embarrassment. It's a blight on the record of a tolerant and fair-minded community that, I think, it is urgent we erase, and we have the opportunity to do it now. For any members that weren't persuaded by the arguments on my Standing Order 40 last week, this is a chance for all of us to redeem ourselves and move this thing on so we get to debate on an issue which is important to Alberta's children, implementation of the UN convention, not ratification, because of course we're not a sovereign state.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of us in this House, including certainly the Member for Calgary-McCall, consider the United Nations declaration on the rights of the child to be an important matter and one that we should again revisit in the normal processes. Standing Order 30 provides an opportunity for this House to adjourn the regular business to debate a matter of "urgent public importance," and without in any way derogating from the essence of the universal declaration on the rights of the child itself, it's difficult to see where a debate on ratification by Alberta is urgent, and that is indeed the test which must be met.

The declaration was adopted by the United Nations on November 20, 1989. It came into force on September 2, 1990. It was ratified by Canada on December 11, 1991, and came into force in Canada on January 13, 1992. The Alberta government by letter of January 24, 1990, from my predecessor the Hon. Jim Horsman, advised the government of Canada that Alberta supported the signing by Canada of the convention. The Alberta government by letter dated December 4, 1991, tabled again in this House last week, advised the government of Canada that the laws of Alberta conform with the articles of the convention. In fact, in all areas of the convention Alberta meets or exceeds the standard that the convention sets for the rights of the child. Whether it's in health or education or social supports or legal rights, Alberta's children are protected in meaningful ways in accordance with the spirit and intent, in accordance with the principles of the convention. Alberta has indicated a reservation similar to one that I understand was put forward by the Vatican, indicating a concern that the language of the convention does not make clear that the convention "in no way interferes with or undermines the primary authority and responsibilities of parents in the care and raising of children in Alberta."

Last week a government member, the Member for Calgary-McCall, rose in this House to make a private member's statement on the matter. Questions have been raised in the House over the past week, and we've now had an indication that there will be a consideration of this matter through the normal processes of

government with the Member for Calgary-McCall bringing it forward to the standing policy committee for discussion.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, there is no real or demonstrated urgency. The children of Alberta are not going to be affected one way or the other by the adoption of the convention. We already adhere to the principles; our legislation is in accord. While gestures can be very important, gestures alone are weak. Many of the signatories to the convention have reported human rights records which are less than flattering in this area. Alberta agrees with the spirit and intent of the accord, the principles of the accord, and while we have not yet endorsed the accord because of specific reservations on language, our legislation complies, and we're doing much, much more than so many jurisdictions in this area.

Mr. Speaker, raising this matter this afternoon is not a matter of urgency; it's a matter of political expediency and should not be proceeded with.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, first of all I wish to repeat what I said a little earlier, that proper notice of this motion was provided pursuant to Standing Order 30(1), and prior to this question being put to the Assembly in accordance with Standing Order 30(2), the chair must rule whether this motion contravenes any of the requirements of Standing Order 30(7). As has been indicated, this matter has been before this Legislative Assembly, as I recall, going back to 1989, and certainly memory suggests to me that on many occasions in the past number of years this matter has been discussed and certainly has been discussed in recent days as well.

I would like to repeat the requirements of Standing Order 30(7)(a), which states that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." While this may certainly be a matter of considerable importance, it would appear that this matter does not appear to constitute what would come under "a genuine emergency."

I would also like to point out two additional things with respect to the motion. Under our rule 30(7)(c) it says that "not more than one matter may be discussed on the same motion." The motion in question has two matters associated with it. It's broken in half, and there are two rather than one. Standing Order 30(6) says that "an emergency debate does not entail any decision of the Assembly." The motion in question is asking for a decision of the Assembly.

Accordingly, I find that the hon. member's request fails to meet the requirements under Standing Order 30. The chair will not put the question, and the request will not proceed.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 49

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998 (No. 3)

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, Bill 49, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, deals with a number of matters and their funding. These matters have been in the public arena for discussion for some period of time and are now before the Legislature, and I would hope that all members would be wanting to expedite the ratification of these.

Just by way of some example, Mr. Speaker, the supplementary estimate of \$149 million related to the lottery fund payments includes \$9 million to the Calgary regional health authority for support and construction and development of a centralized high-volume laboratory testing facility, \$130 million to Transportation

and Utilities to provide onetime funding for municipal transportation infrastructure, and \$10 million to provide funds to Municipal Affairs to fund the government's commitment to the capital regional for regional co-ordination.

The operating expense related to Family and Social Services is primarily and significantly related to the fact that their 1998-99 spending authority was reduced by an encumbrance for the expense recorded in 1997-98 for settlement of legal claims. Mr. Speaker, that expense was recorded at the end of 1997-98, and it wasn't possible to vote additional spending authority at that particular fiscal year.

On Health, the supplementary estimate of \$225,165,000 is required to provide, among other things, \$37,200,000 to practitioner services, of which \$29,400,000 is for fee-for-services and benefit payments, \$3,600,000 for alternate payments for physician services, and \$4,200,000 for the rural on-call program. Also, there is \$60 million related to the human tissue and blood services, of which \$30 million is for Alberta's share of the Canadian Blood Services agency and \$30 million for Alberta's share of the financial assistance to hepatitis C victims; \$103,965,000 is going to the RHAs to address some emerging cost pressures related to population growth, which is a direct result of the Alberta advantage and more people coming here; \$24,000,000 to provide provincewide services, which gives an indication of the extra and added and ongoing commitment to health as a priority of this government.

In Municipal Affairs, a supplementary estimate of \$13,442,000. There are administrative costs and payments to municipalities there related to the senatorial nominee elections and \$10 million to fund the government's commitment to the capital region for co-ordination. I commend the capital region for the level of co-ordination which they have shown in terms of the development of some of their areas of concern.

So, Mr. Speaker, along with what will flow through to Transportation and Utilities, that results in \$25 million being expedited for the north/south corridor, as committed; \$22 million for grants to rural municipalities for local roads, including access roads to the Métis settlements; \$10 million for secondary highways to accelerate previously approved projects; \$58 million for the Alberta cities transportation partnership, which includes primary highways and truck routes in cities and transit priorities; and \$15 million for the streets improvement program to help reduce a backlog of eligible projects.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that all members would agree that this is a significant addressing of the Alberta advantage at work and the growth pressures incumbent to that. I would hope that we move to see passage of this at second reading, and I would so move it in that direction.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed interesting when we hear talk about the Alberta advantage and the fact that the Alberta advantage has prompted this government to reinvest the dollar amounts that were taken out over the last five years. It begs the question as to the planning ability of this government and whether or not there was ever a plan to begin with from '93-94 on.

I know that the Minister of Energy did in fact have a plan, and that plan was to cut fast, cut quick, cut without any consultation, and hope that in the end there would in effect be a positive result. What we've seen, however, now that we've lived the effects of the plan for over five years, is that that doesn't work. What we've seen is that the current Treasurer, who has become the king of supplementary estimates, has in fact done exactly what this

government said they would never do. While it's true that in the past what happened was that the government authorized special warrants, today what we're doing is calling it appropriation or supplementary supply; in effect, the results are the same.

In effect what ends up happening is that outside the confines of this Legislative Assembly, where the budget is generally discussed and approved or should be discussed and approved, there are decisions made behind closed doors by cabinet, by ministers, and those decisions then have an effect on the taxpayer, that taxpayer that the Treasurer likes to talk about and how much respect he has for those sweat-soaked loonies. In effect what he's showing is disrespect through these supplementary estimates, the appropriation, because those dollars have been spent or are allocated. He's not coming to the Legislative Assembly to ask permission. The minister is not coming to the Legislative Assembly to explain the expenditures. The Treasurer is bringing this to the Legislative Assembly after the fact. When you look at it, we have had more appropriations, supplementary supplies, in the last five years of this government under the current Premier than we ever had in the former government.

So it begs the question: what does it mean when the government says that it is being careful with the taxpayer's dollar? It begs the question: what kind of respect does the minister have for the sweat-soaked loonie of the taxpayer? And it begs the question as to what kind of plans have been made with regards to the various areas that are under ministerial direction.

In particular, when we look at Bill 49 and the areas that have been allocated additional resources -- and those are areas that are in dire need of additional resources: health care, infrastructure, and education -- what we see is a lack of planning, a lack of foresight. In fact, some of the items that have a dollar allocation towards them are for practitioner services and for additional funding to the increase in compensation for justices of the peace. When we look at how one manages, one always manages in terms of a budget by looking at what the proposed pay raises might be and what proposed salary increases may occur during the term of that fiscal year. Obviously, the government has either shut their eyes to the fact that there might have to be increases in compensation for these particular services or they wish to deny the fact that they might in fact lose the court case with regards to the justices of the peace or the battle for increased compensation for practitioner services.

3:10

Again, when we look at some of the other areas where the dollars are being allocated, we see that there is \$127 million to address the cost pressures of the regional health authorities. Now, how could we ever have come to this state of affairs? How could we have ever come to a state of affairs where \$127 million is required to be allocated to regional health authorities to cut down on waiting lists, to ensure that there are defined services and adequate hospital beds for the individuals in this province that require health care? When you ask that question, you come to one answer: lack of planning and lack of foresight. When you ask the question as to how we have to spend \$3.4 million on a senatorial nominee election -- and that wasn't allocated in the budget at the beginning of the year -- the only answer can be that the government didn't have it in their plans at the beginning of the year. Had they had it in their plans to go onto an agenda of following the Reform initiative of having Senate elections within this province, it would have been allocated in the budget last February.

When we look at other areas as well in terms of the settlement of legal claims dealing with victims of sexual sterilization and the fact that dollars need to be allocated to the Ministry of Family and

Social Services to settle that particular claim, again the answer can only be that there wasn't foresight, that there wasn't planning, that there wasn't the realization that this was a real issue within the province of Alberta, and that the Minister of Family and Social Services did not have the foresight or did not wish to have the foresight to ensure that those dollars would be there at the beginning of the fiscal year.

So here we are, caught again. This is, I believe, the third set. It's not the first, and it's not the second, but it's the third set of supplementary estimates that we have had in front of us in this Legislative Assembly. So the total amount, for those that may not be cognizant of the total amount, of unbudgeted spending that has been brought in by this Provincial Treasurer and by the cabinet is \$1.434 billion. That's billion, with a "b." That's close to 1 and a half billion dollars. Now, Mr. Speaker, that's a lot of money. That's a lot of blood-soaked loonies that have not been planned for in advance by this particular government, and what is interesting . . . [interjection] Sweat-soaked loonies; thank you. In some instances, though, it is blood-soaked as well.

What is interesting is that because there is no planning, the question then follows -- I have a lot of questions with regards to the appropriation bill -- what happens next year? Do these form in fact a base from which next year's budget is planned, or are these extras? If they are extras, can the different areas, can the health care sector in fact actually plan on those dollars being there when they're looking at their long-range plans?

The reason I bring that up is that the Premier on November 20, 1997, which was not that long ago, said that if the money is not there, no matter how worthy a program it is, it won't be funded. The Minister of Energy more recently, on March 10, 1998, said that health and other programs could be chopped if increased spending and a drop in energy royalties push the province towards a budget shortfall. In fact, I'm not sure if this was a threat or not from the Minister of Energy, but he adds in that particular article: do people really want to call me out again?

The reality is that these dollars that have not been planned for, that are considered extra, may or may not be there when the people of Alberta need them again. If they are not there, the question is: what happens to this province's much vaunted reinvestment? At this point our reinvestment is almost at the levels of '93-94, when the government felt that in fact there had been too much spending, that in fact the services were too rich, if I remember the former Treasurer, who indicated that the only reason we had the wealth of services we had in this province was because Albertans had demanded it and therefore were given it and that now they were going to be taken away. We've seen the effects of the taking away. We've seen three hospitals closed in Calgary; actually, one has been blown up. We've seen hospitals in the Edmonton region where units have been shut down and now are reopening. We see in fact that the reinvestment is not being managed either.

So what we have in fact in front of us is a bill that does not have any explanation in it as to how it will contribute to meeting any defined outcomes. Again, this government is very interested in outcomes. They have three-year budgets that are moving targets, it appears, because obviously those budgets are never met within the guidelines that are put forward. Otherwise, we wouldn't have appropriation bills. We have targets within those budgets that are also very rarely met, and when they're not met, what in fact happens is that those targets move; they change. They shift according to the whim of the department so that it can look good at the end of the day. But in reality the services are not there.

It would be interesting to know if in fact with this addition of dollars there are some indications from, for instance, the Health

department as to: what are the effects of these dollars when it comes to reduced health care waiting lists, what are the effects with regards to the opening up of hospital beds, and what is still lacking? For instance, it appears that in the Calgary area there is still a lack of funding for seniors' care and that seniors in the Calgary area will have to wait until spring in order to have enough beds they can go into for long-term care. So the effect of a lack of planning is that what we have is seniors in expensive hospital beds, as opposed to long-term beds, waiting for a transfer. In fact, according to a *Calgary Herald* article I just was looking at recently, there are 350 that are waiting in the community for admission to a nursing home. Now, this is obviously not acceptable, but there is no plan that I can see that will address that particular issue.

3:20

We had questions today in the Legislature on the fact that there are 26 of 60 school boards that will, in effect, run a deficit in the province and that in the Edmonton area alone that deficit will be in the neighbourhood of \$12 million. Now, given that the government and the school boards are not supposed to be deficit budgeting, the question is: what is the long-term plan? What is the plan? Is it a repeat of this year's and of last year's plan, which was no plan? Is it a repeat so that the Provincial Treasurer, who doesn't like being called the king of supplementary estimates but would prefer to be called the monarch of supplementary estimates, can top his record of this year and so that as opposed to having three supplementary estimates brought into the Legislative Assembly, there will perhaps be four or five next year? Is it in fact to make a mockery of the whole process that this government's reputation stands on, a reputation of running government like a business, a reputation of management, a reputation of having three-year plans and having performance objectives?

That, Mr. Speaker, is what the supplementary estimates in fact do. They make a mockery of the fact that this government believes they can manage the finances of this province. In fact, what we have been seeing is a mismanagement of the finances of this province. If we were to have a budget that would cover all possible contingencies, that would show that there was a vision and a plan for the year, and then we would not have to be addressing Bill 49, the appropriation act, 1998.

I'm looking forward to hearing what the ministers have in explanation in their particular areas as to what the reasons are for some of their allocations and how they intend to measure the effectiveness of those allocations at this point in time. I would wish to know, which is perhaps more interesting, if there is going to be any more reinvestment done between now and February of 1999 that Albertans need to be aware of and need to know how their dollars in fact are being spent.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the principles of this bill, which in fact allocates some more funds from the common pot, called the treasury, to the delivery of services in this province. It strikes this member as rather odd that this government feels they are adequately planning for the future of this province without any kind of plan whatever, as evident by the ad hocery of this secondary budget. Look at the expenditures that fall from it. It's just astounding that you can wave a wand and say, "Yes, this should be expended here, and this should be expended there," without any real plan as to how the moneys are allocated for the problems and therefore the solutions that should follow to the betterment of the people of this province.

When we are in the face of a surplus that's a quarter billion dollars and when we're at a 12-year or 13-year low in oil prices in this province and we still run a surplus, there's something fundamentally wrong with the planning. When you bottom it out and say, "Yes, that's where we should be, at our best guess, in the budget" and set expenditures according to need and the income according to that which is received in the way of royalties and taxes and the like, this should match fairly closely, particularly when you lowball the income. Well, you can't lowball the income much lower than \$12 or \$10 a barrel for oil. I mean, somebody is missing the boat here.

Now, it may be -- and I certainly wouldn't ascribe this to any member opposite, particularly the Treasurer -- that some would believe that the budgets are struck to make the government feel good and look good at the end of the year with this massive surplus. Well, that isn't the right way to budget. I mean, you couldn't budget a business that way. You could not budget a family business in that manner. Otherwise, the decisions one makes on that which is left over from the expenditures relative to the income would not be good decisions, because you couldn't make decisions before that time.

Now, I would think that with a \$12 billion budget one could come a little closer than 5 percent in guessing where the expenditures would be. Yes, it's true that it would be darn difficult in a province that relies on royalties from nonrenewable natural resources to predict precisely the income level, but that's not the difficulty that I'm having with this budget. It's the expenditure levels that I'm having difficulty with, that one can holus-bolus throw an increase of 25 percent into a transportation budget, the fundamentals of infrastructure in this province. This province is a vast province. In this province all the economic activity is based on transportation, on moving goods and services and people from one part of the province to another. To decide arbitrarily that a 25 percent increase in a budget to that fundamental of economic development seems to this member folly in the worst sense. The worst kind of budgeting is this sort of last-minute deciding as to how these expenditures are made.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

If this House really, really truly wanted to understand the feeling of the people of the province, then cause some real debate, some committee debate, subcommittee, or whatever structure the government wants, so long as you're looking to find the true information, not to preset the information that you want to get back in answer but to really find out what the people of the province believe in the way of their priorities and to fully discuss the relationship of current expenditures.

Let's take, for an example, infrastructure in roads. You have those that will want you to build and spend all kinds of money, the road builders, and it's their lot to promote road building because that's how they make a living, quite frankly. Then you have the others of us that use the roads and those representatives of the users of the roads. I'm thinking of the AMA. I'm thinking of the transport truckers: the long-haul truckers and the local delivery. I'm thinking of the cab companies. I'm thinking of the local delivery trucks. All of those people have a great deal at stake in the transportation systems, and when those infrastructures start breaking down, they spend thousands and thousands of dollars a year on wheel alignments because the potholes are so great that they cause them extra money. They'd much prefer to have some of their tax dollars, their sweat-soaked loonies if you will, go to those kinds of expenditures that save them those expenses.

Think of a farmer having to deliver grain over a road that has to be continually repaired because his loads have increased from the '50s to now about almost 80 tonnes moving down the road on a wheeled vehicle. Now, that's a big rig, and it destroys a lot of infrastructure. The infrastructure has to change. This government doesn't seem to recognize that that is good planning. You do it on a long-range basis in order to get the best prices, which we're all interested in. To get the best prices out of transportation services, the roadways and the like, you plan a long ways out so that you develop the size of a private contracting force that is able to handle that amount of volume that is coming out and so that it becomes very competitive and stays competitive, such that you don't have a rise and a fall in that level that would make it uneconomical for a business to stay in business in the province of Alberta but, likewise, not having to overpay those that are in short supply at the time.

3:30

So you do this long-range planning. What you don't do, the classic thing to not do in contracting in a limited market, such as roadworks are, is stop and go, stop and go, and stop and go. You don't do that. I'm sure a number of those opposite have had representations from Alberta road builders saying that that is absolutely the worst way to spend money. If you're going to have a surplus of any kind, then there are many, many other areas where it can be spent on an ad hoc basis.

My suggestion is that if this \$130 million extra is needed annually from the budgeted amount, then place that in the budget. Give the business the understanding that that is the gross amount that'll be in subsequent budgets over the years, over a number of years, a three- or four-year rolling average, and they will gear to that. They will gear to the production of that level and give this government and municipal governments across the province and private owners also the best of both worlds, the best possible service, the best possible pricing, because it'll be ultimately competitive.

Now, moving on. Time is short in these debates, shorter than the debating itself actually, if one wanted to truly speak of all of the areas. The question has been asked once today and earlier last week by the Premier too: how much is enough? Well, those are questions posed by the government to the opposition presumably, because we're the only others in the House. But the answer is never really listened to. I mean, there isn't any really true debate. If this province actually believes that there is but one taxpayer in the province, that each individual member of the public is but one taxpayer, and that collectively we pay all the taxes that are here, then you actually would have that debate, particularly as it relates to school taxes, municipal taxes, and the loaded-upon taxes of income tax and corporate income tax, which piggyback on the federal laws related to taxes.

You would have that debate. Yes, it would be in large measure limited to those that are interested in the philosophy, to start off with, but then you came down to the hard numbers and you asked the tough questions and said simply: "You're going to pay this tax bill anyway; this is your gross amount of tax. We're debating this on the basis of the services staying neutral, unchanged, and the whole tax bill will be the same; i.e., there won't be any change, no net effect on it. Now, where would you rather pay it? Where would you rather have the incentive put?" The worst place -- the worst place -- to put that would be on one's home, because you can't change that. Once it's fixed and if taxes ascend on that, that's the worst place to put a tax. It's simply not good planning.

If you really wanted to put it on and you asked the people how to do it, they'd say: "Well, look. Either tax me on income tax, tax me when I make money, because quite frankly when I make

a lot of money, I don't mind paying some, or tax me when I buy something, because sometimes I like to think that I'm a very, very, very prudent manager of my funds, and I would much rather you tax me at the other end." Now, if you get that kind of debate, you'll have the people of this province after a certain length of time, I'm sure, as was suggested by the accountants of this province a couple of years ago, saying: "Yes, maybe it is time to have a PST. Maybe it is. If it's not going to cost me any more here, if I can pay a PST and not have quite so much on my house, then if I don't spend any more money on this, being on a fixed income now, maybe I can make it to my old age without having to spend. I'm buying painfully little." Now, that's one taxpayer that happens to be a very elderly person on a fixed income. That could be their solution.

On the other hand of course, in the other part of the debate you might say that the renter might not really feel they're paying tax and say: "No, no, no. I want it all the other way." But what you do have is this fundamental debate, and we in this province are probably the only people that I know of certainly in Canada -- and I'm not versed in other places in the world -- that have this same disposable income which, as this bill would show, can be thrown hither, thither, and yon. We are in a perfect position for this kind of debate. We are absolutely in the position where we can take some time out to decide where these funds would go and have the luxury of having enough stable income to make a transition. The transitions in tax are always horribly difficult because it takes a certain amount of time for people to catch up as to how they actually pay.

This is the perfect time. We are between elections. This government is safe in office, at least to my calculation, for another three and a half years. This is absolutely the right time. Yet what do we get? We get no debate at all. We get an ad hoc dictum of what and how it should be spent. There are those that would say that it would be bordering for sure on negligence that this government has not gotten into these fundamental questions, has not asked the person next door.

Now, it's summertime and you're having a chat with the neighbour just next door or at the grocery. Ask these fundamental questions and see if you get kind of a response; see if you get a thoughtful response. You'd say: well, yeah, I'd be interested in spending an hour or two talking about that. The information that could be put together, that this government has the wherewithal to do at the snap of a finger -- a very, very small package needs to be put together instead of the tripe that the Treasurer puts out as to "Do you want a tax break or not?" and a big leading question to it. I mean, ask the fundamental questions. You're not asking people for answers. What you're asking is to get some response from them so that they understand the options that this government has, unlike any other government possible.

I should like to turn my attention, with time marching on here, to the area that was near and dear to my heart for many years and in fact remains there, and that's the other question of taxation: municipal taxation. The chair understands the concern because she, too, in a former life had to deal with the sweat-soaked loonies of her labour in order to produce a budget that was acceptable to her council and to her ratepayers. Now, if you want to test that principle of one taxpayer in the province, just ask any municipal councillor in this province: is there perhaps a better way of spending those moneys? One of the things that they would say is: "Look; we can probably do our job with the money that we have available if we had a little more tax room. We can't tax our people any more, but back off on some of the school taxes."

When I was going to school as, I'm sure, when most of us here

were going to school, the actual split between that which was applied to property tax and that which was applied to the provincial budget was 90-10. Now it's 50-50, so half of the moneys raised for the local school board in fact, 45 or 50 percent, somewhere in that order, comes from the property base. Well, the property base is a terrible way to raise taxes.

If you look into classic economics, it says that that which attracts tax is that which uses tax. The property is not getting educated, not at all. That is a service that's required fundamentally, and it should come directly out of the provincial treasury. Yes, perhaps there is some 5 or 10 percent that you might want to attach to the local property to provide the extras, the recreation services and that sort of thing, that are generally more easily provided by the local municipality.

3:40

I'd say to you that there's a provision here for some tens of millions of dollars that were plucked from the air. There was a perception during the municipal campaign of this year, of 1998, that Edmonton was being maltreated in the delivery of some \$580 million of infrastructure moneys. I haven't studied it, and those that do tell me that, yes, you could read into it that Edmonton was not getting their fair share, although on a per capita basis with the magnitude of Calgary versus the magnitude of Edmonton and adding the surrounding capital region municipalities, you could say that there was a slight there. But the solution is not just ad hoc and throw \$10 million to it. That's what has occurred here. It's the worst of planning. Maybe it's the best of politics, because the avowed Tory mayor in this city was elected. I don't know whether it was on that basis or not, but it does seem to me the worst kind of political sop to be throwing out, just political opportunism at its absolute worst.

It's not that the expenditure of funds shouldn't have been put out, but it should have been in the proper place, in the transportation budget, and it should have been part of a good concept, that north/south corridor. That's a fundamental part of it. It was one of the weakest links; I'm speaking of Anthony Henday Drive. But not this ad hockery for sure.

We have a total lack of planning actually in the \$304 million for a Senate election. [Mr. White's speaking time expired] Oh, I'm so sorry I didn't speak faster and get more words in.

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

DR. NICOL: Thanks, Madam Chairman. I'd like to just raise a couple of questions and deal with the issues that are facing us in this debate on Bill 49, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998. This is, I guess, a good approach to keeping our budgeting process in line with the process that's set out in the Financial Administration Act, but we also have a few questions that are raised by the way it's presented and the way we are asked to be approving this bill.

One of the things that comes out quite strikingly in it is the fact that out of all of the dollars that are being allocated in the context of the bill, what we've got is a breakdown between what would be considered ongoing dollar expenditures; in other words, a commitment for each of the budget years subsequent to the supplementary supply for 1998. That includes the dollars that are being put into the expenditures of the Ministry of Health, the \$225 million, and the amount, \$4.3 million approximately, that's going to the Ministry of Justice. These are basically ongoing expenditures. It also includes the dollars that are being put into the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the \$50.7 million. The money going to Family and Social Services is a onetime expenditure.

“ What we’ve got is only about \$165 million that is actually going to go right out to the front line, where the services need to be supplemented. The rest of it is expenditures that are associated with onetime fix-up type expenditures. I guess that leads one to question the approach that’s taken as we have a budget that has a built-in contingency fund. It’s almost like the old department budget. When you got allocated \$100 million and you got to the end of the fiscal year and you found out that you still had \$10 million, rather than letting that revert to Treasury, you spent it. Well, this is what we’ve got here now, a department that puts \$300 million, \$400 million, up to \$700 million over the last few years into a contingency fund, and then as they get close to the end of the year, they say: oh, well, we didn’t need that contingency fund; we’d better spend it.

Effectively, what we’ve got is a Treasurer now that’s allocating dollars into that to the tune of about \$220 million, that are going to be one-shot expenditures, and this budget had about \$365 million in that contingency area. So essentially what we’re seeing is the kind of fix-up dollars coming out of that contingency fund in the budget. I guess that leads one to question whether or not this is the kind of thing we’ll see every fall session as the budget starts to unfold for the year and the government then decides: “Oh, well, we no longer have a net debt. Maybe sometime in the future we’ll no longer have a debt to pay down. Rather than say we had a surplus, let’s just spend it on something.” So this is the kind of question that has to be raised in looking at how this is.

Now, Madam Speaker, that doesn’t say that I question the areas that they put the dollars into. I’m saying: yes, a lot of these areas do need those supplementary dollars being added to them. It’s very obvious that the health care system needed the extra \$220 million, and it’s very obvious that we had to have the dollars to help implement some of the commitments that came up in the middle of the year, like the contribution of Alberta to the Canadian Blood Services, which is about \$30 million that that’s going to cost us. The expenditures for the hepatitis C victims is also an expenditure that couldn’t have been planned before because we had no agreement. If you start putting dollars aside, you in essence compromise your ability to negotiate by saying: we’re putting these dollars up. Everybody knows what’s in the kitty, and they can then negotiate to the full extent of the dollars available.

You know, these are the kinds of things that I guess justify contingency funds, but then when you see them being allocated to such things as transportation and to the other areas, you begin to wonder, “Well, this is kind of patch-up,” and people then begin to wonder if maybe it isn’t getting back a little bit to the political patronage, the payment of favours: you know, we’ve got a little extra money; let’s buy a few votes while we’re at it. So this is, I guess, a perception that we have to look at in the context of how these dollars are being allocated.

These are, Madam Speaker, some of the questions that were put to me when I had my annual general meeting last Thursday night and went to a couple of functions over the weekend. People were talking about how the government is spending money. They pulled out some of these new onetime fix-up expenditures, like the dollars that were going into transportation, and said: are we getting close to an election? That was kind of a common question that they asked. So what it does is it leads us to look a little bit, then, at how we have to handle the public relations that comes with budgets that are fix-up budgets, that are associated with new, unplanned, and unnegotiated expenditures. We have to deal with that. I guess the end result is that as we get to looking at the different expenditures, we have to say: is this the kind of thing we need?

Also, I guess when you look at it, the expenditures have no real

dollars in them that I see helping the crisis situation we’re in. If they were going to put out onetime expenditures, this would have been a good time to say: okay; let’s put \$50 million, \$100 million out there to shorten the lists in the health care system. If you’ve got a stable social system, then the appropriate number of dollars are going into the health care system, into education so that the, quote, waiting lists or the overcrowding measures are not increasing. We haven’t seen that in Alberta, because our waiting lists are still increasing and our class sizes are still increasing. So effectively we have not reached an equilibrium situation in our funding of these areas that are of importance to Albertans.

3:50

Now, what we’ve got to do there: okay; so we put the \$225 million that goes into Health. That’s going to increase the likelihood of us creating an equilibrium situation, and we’ll see whether or not that is achieved by whether or not the waiting lists stop increasing. Once we reach that equilibrium situation, then we have to put ourselves in a situation of: is that level of waiting acceptable? If it isn’t, then we need the onetime expenditure to bring that waiting list down to a level that is acceptable.

Madam Speaker, as an operations research analyst it’s not desirable or preferable to have a zero waiting list. That’s not appropriate spending of public dollars, but some waiting list is a trade-off between the expenditure that’s required and a social conscience, and we have to look at it there. I don’t see that in the context of the way the dollars are being allocated here. We don’t see dollars that are really going to go into supporting and facilitating a reduction in those waiting lists or dollars for Education to reduce the increasing class size characteristic that exists in that area.

What we should have had were some dollars in the health care system that went into the fields of providing more access to operating rooms or more access to emergency rooms instead of dollars that went into the issue of practitioners’ services. That’s just a negotiated settlement reflecting the increased fee payment that needs to be paid to maintain the doctors’ participation. What we’ve got to do is look at: is it increasing the capacity of the system to handle the health care problems? I would say no.

We look also at the other expenditures that are there. The only one that potentially could do that is the \$127 million that’s being distributed to the RHAs to help relieve pressure points, and if the pressure points are interpreted correctly by the regional authorities, then what we can see is a degree of increased satisfaction by the users of the health care system in those authorities. It’ll be interesting to see whether or not in the next year we see the Health Council giving us a more positive report card when they come back and say that people are accepting the health care system, are encouraged by the health care they receive to a greater degree than they were this year. If that doesn’t occur, then obviously that \$127 million that is going into the cost pressures of the RHAs isn’t being put into the right places or isn’t being put in in a large enough amount to really make a difference to the users of the system. So it’s interesting to look at that.

As we deal with the issues of appropriations and I guess the way it comes out and looking at how the dollars line up in the schedule that’s attached to Bill 49, it’s kind of difficult as we look those through to see how the dollars relate and the numbers come out and compare it to the document that we had when we were dealing with the Committee of Supply. It’s difficult to relate the numbers together. I add them up in one document and come up with \$440 million, and when we add them up in the bill, it comes to \$431 million. You kind of wonder where I’m making the

mistake. So I'm going to have to go back and get my electronic calculator instead of my neurologic calculator. It's getting old I guess is the problem with it, and we need to be able to do this higher math with some help from new technologies.

Madam Speaker, I think what we've got to do, I guess in the context, is get some answers to these questions in terms of: is this going to be a common practice, using up the contingency fund as the fiscal year draws to an end? Are we really putting the dollars into areas that are responsive to the issues of the community, their expressed concerns about health care, their expressed concerns about the overcrowding and the way the education system is being funded? You know, I don't think there's a community out there that wouldn't deal with the \$130 million going into Transportation as being something they could use some of, and it'll be interesting now to see where those dollars end up.

The only other thing that you look at in the context of the overall expenditures is the relationship between the expenditure pattern here and the community agendas. The minister is already allocating \$10 million from lottery funds to support regional co-ordination. These are the kinds of issues that come out and talk about the ability of communities to work together to make joint decisions for the betterment of something beyond their own borders. If this is, as the minister talked about the other night, an initiative where the collective of communities was given a ballpark figure and told, "Now, if you had these dollars, what could you do with it?" and they came up with the suggestion that for the collection of the whole set of communities involved they would like to see the money spent on the Anthony Henday Drive, then I guess that's good planning. That's responsive action.

The question is: does it set a precedent to the point that if other groups get together and start saying, "This is what we want," we will be getting special authorizations and special initiatives developed on their behalf? Or will they have to wait and get their dollars out of the normal funding? This is something that I guess we want to look at in the context of: is that particular initiative creating a precedent in the way we deal with new initiatives that arise midyear, where groups can come along and say, "Well, we know we're getting money for our roads over here, but because we all want to get together on this, we're going to ask for a special initiative, and we'll want special dollars just to serve us for this particular project"?

So, Madam Speaker, kind of speaking in principle and to the philosophy behind some of the allocations, even though I addressed some of them specifically, it was more from: is it the kind of thing we should be expecting or that we should be accepting from the budgeting process, the expenditure approval process? And I've raised those questions now.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll wait until we get into committee to deal with some fine-tuning of some of the minor numbers. Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Just a couple of observations and reflections in terms of speaking on this particular appropriation, Bill 49. I had the opportunity when the Minister of Health presented himself before the Committee of Supply on November 25 to raise a number of questions and issues. The minister to his credit was present in the Assembly and on at least three occasions I remember stood in his place and offered some commentary to the questions that had been put. Not surprisingly, he didn't always have specific responses to specific questions asked.

I just would register the concern I have, and it's something of a process issue. If appropriation acts and the debate surrounding them is to be informed, to be appropriate, and to be worth while, I think there's a reasonable obligation on the part of the minister who's seeking an appropriation to be able to provide a reasonably high degree of clarity, specific detail, a full explanation.

It's been my experience in the six years I've been an MLA, Madam Speaker, that this seems like a bit of an empty exercise in the sense that we're within days of seeing the supplementary estimates -- we're voting the appropriation bill. The Health minister is probably one of the more responsive ministers in my experience. He at least was here when we debated these things. He's made an effort to respond to the questions. That's not true of all of his colleagues. So we end up in a situation now where my constituents and I expect other Albertans have an expectation that this Assembly has some real degree of control, direction, some sense of exactly where the dollars are going and ensuring that this is appropriate. I'm not for a moment arguing against additional dollars going into health care, but I just have to stress the kind of disappointment that there seems to be so little global planning.

4:00

I had the benefit of going to the standing policy committee on health planning when there was a presentation of the Laing report, I think it's being called, the one chaired by the Member for Calgary-Bow. There were a number of members there, and although the questions were mainly more laudatory statements, one of the things that was expressed there by -- it seems to me it was Dr. Percy, a former member in this Assembly. Somebody asked him about long-term planning, because that's what regional health authorities want to see. That's what I think most Albertans want: long-term funding commitments; thoughtful, comprehensive long-term plans. He was asked by one of the government members something about long-term planning, and he acknowledged, being one of the co-authors of the Laing report, that no, this report frankly wasn't about long-term planning; what it was about was dealing with some of the most immediate pressure points in the system.

In fact, we have here with us this afternoon the chairperson of that health planning standing policy committee, who will have remembered that very exchange I'm talking about, when Dr. Percy was saying that this report has some limitations, because really what they've identified are some areas of critical need or certainly where there's been a lot of public attention focused. So that speaks to the continuing problem we have in this province, that money goes not necessarily where the need is highest, not necessarily where the most compelling need is. The money tends to go where the most noise is being made. [A cell phone rang] Madam Speaker, you're maybe being paged. It may be time for celestial intervention.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Would somebody please look after that as quickly as possible.

MR. DICKSON: I was real scared for a moment, Madam Speaker, that my 20 minutes were up, and I'd barely got started. [interjections] Thanks for that support from all members. Thanks for that encouragement from colleagues in the Assembly.

In any event, my concern was this. When I went to that committee ably chaired by our friend from Calgary-Fish Creek, what I found was this, Madam Speaker: a disarmingly frank admission that that report from the Laing committee wasn't what Albertans had been looking for. It wasn't what the Provincial

Health Council said we needed. It was not the blueprint for long-term comprehensive reform. There were, admittedly, elements of it that looked promising and looked like maybe they were heeding the admonition of the Provincial Health Council, but on balance, when one of the authors of the report frankly admitted that really this wasn't that which we'd been looking for, I was very disappointed, and I think lots of Albertans would be disappointed that that continues to elude us.

As much as I'd like to see the regional health authorities elected, I acknowledge that the people that are there on an appointed basis are working hard to try and do what they think is best for their area, but they're put in this position where they never know, it seems, from month to month whether they're going to have enough money to be able to do the job they've been asked to do by the Minister of Health. We saw those three different funding announcements in 1998 with different amounts of money going in. I know from my discussions with members of the Calgary regional health authority and the Capital authority, particularly some of the bigger authorities, that it's just a vexing problem, a vexing challenge in terms of how you can hire people, how you can commit to open hospital beds. All of these things mean long-term expenditures, and it's very difficult to do that without the assurance that there's going to be appropriate funding for some lengthy period.

I'll just quickly sum up by saying that there is a need for additional funding in the system. I'm disappointed, number one, that we don't have full responses to the questions that have been asked about the Auditor General's report.

Let me just digress for a moment, Madam Speaker. When we have the benefit of an Auditor General who reviews the health system funding and finds a whole set of irregularities and problems and things that aren't being adequately addressed, would one not think that when the Minister of Health came forward looking for another \$225 million, the Minister of Health would have addressed the issues raised in the Auditor General's report? Would members not expect that the Minister of Health would come in and say, "These are the 18 concerns"? It was my recollection that about 40 pages in the Auditor General's report were devoted to shortcomings in reporting systems and accountability practices in the Department of Health. Is it unrealistic? Did nobody else have an expectation when they came in that the Minister of Health would have at least been able to announce that he was in some meaningful way addressing those shortcomings, those concerns? Maybe it was just my colleagues here in the opposition caucus who had hoped for that, but we didn't get it. I just offer that lament.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Many of the other questions that I raised on November 25 in speaking to the estimates, from page 2129 to 2132 inclusive, are still outstanding, and we can only hope that the minister will come prepared in the spring when we're dealing with the Health budget to answer all of those queries.

We've certainly suggested to the minister -- and maybe it's presumptuous for anybody to suggest we're putting the minister on notice in terms of what we expect when he deals with the Health budget -- that there have to be responses at that time. There can be absolutely no excuse. If the Minister of Health cannot be accountable for each of those specific recommendations made by the Auditor General, to address and to remedy each of those problems in the reporting and accountability systems, then frankly this Chamber is of little practical effect.

Those are the comments I wanted to make at this stage, and I

know there are other caucus colleagues. Just before I take my seat, one of my colleagues has fortunately raised with me a concern that we put to the Minister of Municipal Affairs the other day.

MR. HIERATH: Another 10 minutes.

MR. DICKSON: No. This is going to be much shorter than 10 minutes.

It's always tough to be critical of a minister who works as hard as the Minister of Municipal Affairs to be responsive in the House. I've said that before. No minister works harder at responding to opposition suggestions and requests. But leaving aside her very best efforts -- and I'm appreciative of those -- we continue to be marching towards a housing crisis in the city of Calgary, and what we're left with is a minister who says: sometime in 1999 we're going to have some solutions; we're going to have some answers.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we may only have a few more days in here. When we meet again in the spring, I can only imagine the difficulties for the Drop-in Centre in Calgary, the Mustard Seed in my constituency, CUPS, all of those places, the challenges those men and women have in terms of trying to provide service, in terms of trying to jury-rig with baling wire and binder twine a social service, a support system that's badly eroded. That's not the fault of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, but ultimately when it comes to housing, it's within her responsibility.

4:10

I want to say again my extreme disappointment that in the request put forward from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, I didn't see the plan. She frankly acknowledged with her customary candour that the plan isn't there yet. There are 21 Calgary MLAs here, and I don't know how we're going to go back to our constituencies in the months of December and January and what we can say to those people in Calgary who expect us to come up with some solutions and plans and be able to offer safe and affordable shelter. Today I tabled a petition signed by something like 760-odd Calgarians, not all of them in Calgary-Buffalo. They live in Calgary-Currie and they live in Calgary-Fort, and they live in those other constituencies too, probably in Calgary-Cross, distributed throughout the city.

I'm not meaning to sound apocryphal, but I expect we're going to have some enormous problems this winter. At some point you have to say: what does it take for us to be able to respond in an appropriate way? We're not doing that. Even when Bill 49 passes, I don't see a lot of homeless people in Calgary being sheltered, and I don't see a lot of those seniors who are having to move out of their apartments because they can't afford their third rent increase in 13 months -- that continues to be a problem. We continue to leave that challenge to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and she knows that we're going to be continuing to press her whether we're in the Chamber or out of the Chamber. I just regret that that has not been addressed in Bill 49.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The bill before us is titled the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 1998, No. 3. I can't help but wonder why this bill isn't called the "When are we going to get it right bill?" or the "When are we going to figure it out bill?" It's the third set of supplementary estimates brought before the Assembly in the last 10 months, bringing the amount of supplementary requests to over \$1.1 billion. I don't think I can emphasize the frustration that I have and that many

people who are observing this government have right now, with the feeling they have that when the budget is brought in, they are being sold a bill of goods.

In sales there are a couple of approaches that you can take, particularly if you're not going to be the most honest or straightforward salesperson. One of the approaches you can take is what's called the lowball, Mr. Speaker. You can hold something out to represent tremendous value and then pitch that you can get it for a real discount. You can undercut the price. You can lowball the price. Of course, the object of that is to draw people in. So if you were a salesperson who wanted to use that approach, you would say, for example: "This automobile is worth thousands and thousands of dollars more than you can buy it for. Just between you and me, I'm going to make you a special deal. For you, today only, you can buy this automobile at a lowball price."

Now, when you actually go to sign the contract, what you'll find is that if you want the push buttons on the radio, it costs a little bit extra. If you want the nice chrome wheels that were on the display model, it costs a little bit extra. So by the time you finish adding up all of those little extras, that lowball price has disappeared, and what you have is a huge additional cost that you weren't anticipating. But emotionally, Mr. Speaker, what the salesman is hoping is that you've already been hooked in, that you've already made the mental decision that you're going to buy, and the salesman is hoping that you won't have the strength of character to walk away now that you realize what the true cost is, what that true inflated cost is.

Now, in the lowball approach, of course, what we see is that this government comes in with a budget and says: "We've been terrific managers. We've cut and cut and cut and cut. We've squeezed every dollar. We've gone into every department and nakedized it," or whatever the operating word of the day happens to be, "and we've assembled this budget." But what we're finding is that this government is operating at about the same level as that salesman who would lowball a product, because what happens is we've got over \$1 billion worth of supplementary estimates, over \$1 billion of unplanned expenditures.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have accused the government of many things, but I have never accused them of being so incompetent that they could be that far out in their budgeting process not once, not twice, but three times in the last 10 months. So that reminds me a little bit about that lowball approach.

The other approach that salesmen use and I am reminded of when I look at Bill 49 is the loss leader. [interjections] That's when a retailer puts out something at a low price and tries to get you to come into the store. Of course, one of the things that's happened with this -- do you notice, Mr. Speaker, how disruptive things get as soon as the Treasurer returns to the Assembly? Have you noticed? You know, you can always count on a couple of things in this Assembly, and this Treasurer being a real pain in the neck is one of those things you can always count on.

The other thing that happens is when a retailer -- and I would say that a lot of retailers have had to take this approach as a result of another government policy. That is what's happened with the privatization of liquor sales. You notice that some liquor stores in order to compete are putting out products at an absolutely cut-rate, cutthroat kind of price, actually often below their cost. They'll advertise that product, and that will help build traffic coming into their store, even if they have to take a loss on that price, hence the words "loss leader." They'll take a loss on that price, and then they're hoping that while you're in the store, you'll purchase something else.

Well, this government has offered its budget as sort of a loss

leader. What they've done is that instead of actually telling Albertans what the true costs of delivering services are, they've lowballed it. What happens is that we find out that the real costs are hidden in the deficits that have been taken over by schools boards, by municipal authorities, by regional health authorities. All of those deficits are real. They exist. They put the quality of our services at risk, and the taxpayer still has to foot that bill one way or another. Maybe it's through selling chocolates, like I had to do this weekend for my child's school, or maybe it's by an increase in municipal taxation, which I've got the notice for on its way. So this sales tactic of the loss leader coming from government is one that we are now seeing the results of.

So we've got this combination of these tactics coming home to roost in what is really a very, very disappointing display of mismanagement and poor planning. What's really troubling about it, as if that isn't all bad enough, is that the government, those members of the front bench, the Executive Council, are all too quick to point the finger of blame at somebody else. They're all too quick to say, "Well, the reason why this happened is because, boy, those unions negotiate a tough contract, so we have to pay them more," or "Those doctors actually want to be paid a fair value for their services," or "Gee, those municipal councillors just aren't very good at managing their affairs," or "Gee, those truckers are just chewing up our roads at a pace that we didn't anticipate." They're all too ready to point the finger of blame at everybody except themselves, to pass the buck -- and unfortunately it's our buck that they're passing -- and not accept responsibility for their own failures, and their failures are getting harder and harder and harder to accept. What we see in this bill is not one, not two, not three but five government departments coming back again asking for more money, a third of government services representing actually the majority of the budget areas in government asking for additional revenue.

4:20

My colleagues already spoke to the value of many of the services that will be funded to a healthier level once this bill passes, if it does pass. I know that these comments are just an invitation to supporters of the government to stand up and say: well, is that hon. member arguing against the transportation grant, or is that hon. member arguing against the settlement fees for the sterilization victims? Of course, Mr. Speaker, I'm not arguing against any of those things, and it would be foolhardy and misleading and just untrue for anybody to suggest that either I'm arguing against those particular expenditures or that anybody in the Official Opposition is.

But what we are arguing against is this process. If you go back to my comparison of this government to a couple of salespeople that are either using the lowball technique or the loss leader technique, I guess I could add just another example for you to consider. It's sort of like one of those workers at a carnival. We've all heard the carny pitches: "Come on in. For one thin dime, one tenth of a dollar, yes, you too can get" whatever it is they're trying to sell. [interjections] Oh, that got their attention, Mr. Speaker. You get the members of the government hitting us with these supplementary estimates and saying not once, not twice, but three times: "Yeah. Yes, sir, we're going to get this budget right. Just keep on paying us, and you bet we're going to get it. Just trust us. We're from the government."

Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm tired of it, and I'm tired of having to go back to my constituents and saying: you know, I would really like to be able to support this government and what they're trying to accomplish for services to persons with developmental disabilities.

MR. DAY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer on a purported point of order.

**Point of Order
Questioning a Member**

MR. DAY: Using the *Beauchesne* reference, I wonder if the member opposite would entertain a brief question.

MR. SAPERS: Sure.

Debate Continued

MR. DAY: How many constituents complained to him about this spending that we're talking about right now? How many have complained to him about that?

MR. SAPERS: I'll take the question under advisement. I'll consult my notes. I'll go back to my constituency office. I'll document the concerns, and I'd be happy to table the results to this question.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, it's not that we're opposed to any one of the particular expenditures as they stand, but it is about time that the government was able to actually govern to some level of expectation, to some standard.

In case, Mr. Speaker, there's any doubt in anyone's mind whether or not this is just the Treasurer's problem, that it's just the Treasurer's lack of competence in guiding the budget process that has brought us to the point where we have to come back this third time for these additional millions and millions of dollars, I would say that it's not just the Treasurer's fault. I would say that in fact the Treasurer is probably doing the best he can. I'll let people be the judge of the adequacy of that effort. I would say that the Treasurer is probably doing the best he can, but you have to consider, as well, the company he keeps. Because what we have is this not being the only example of the government's inability to, first of all, articulate their agenda with some clarity and then implement that agenda with some clarity. All you have to do is take a look at the day 58 Order Paper that was put on every member's desk this afternoon at 1:30, when we came into the Chamber, and you see the number of bills that are languishing in never-never land as a result of the government difficulties with either getting their ducks lined up or drafting problems or trying to introduce into law things that were just repugnant and reprehensible like Bill 26 or morally bankrupt like Bill 37, the difficulties in bringing through changes to the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act or the Health Insurance Premiums Amendment Act. I mean, these are all initiatives that the government started and then had to do an about-face on. They had to flip-flop their way back to some form of safety because they were just dead wrong. You put that hand in hand with this supplemental supply process that we're being asked to endorse and you get this absolutely frightening, frightening view of a government adrift, directionless, a government devoid of any clearly articulatable vision or set of values.

AN HON. MEMBER: Articulatable?

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. Look it up. I learned that one from Gary.

I would say that at this stage of this bill I am faced with a mighty challenge, and that challenge really boils down to this. At second reading we're supposed to be speaking about and voting on the principle of a bill, and it's very hard in a supplementary supply estimate to derive a particular principle because by definition the bill is about spending money. It comes on the

advice of the Lieutenant Governor, and it covers a variety of government departments. But there may in fact be a principle embodied in this bill, and it might be the principle of government incompetence. That could be the principle of the bill, and I would say that I cannot vote for that. I cannot support anything this government does to put the process at risk, to take away the credibility of this Chamber, or to diminish the standing of each and every member of this Assembly in the eyes of the public.

So, Mr. Speaker, at this stage of the appropriation bill, the stage where we're supposed to be looking for a principle and then determining whether or not we can support it, I am going to say that I am not, until I hear -- perhaps I will hear arguments that will change my mind. I've certainly heard none to this point, but at this stage, in the absence of those arguments and the absence of any real justification for this debacle, I will say that I will not be supporting the bill at second reading.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer to close debate.

MR. DAY: Well, just to conclude, Mr. Speaker, I think that if we stand accused of spending money at the request, for instance, of municipalities, who had a task force meeting throughout the summer to look at the unprecedented growth beyond which even they had imagined, to which the Alberta advantage is significantly attracting people, a very exciting growth, if we are accused of listening to that, then we stand guilty. If we are accused of listening to concerns in the Calgary area about a very special request, very special, for a certain laboratory facility at the cost of \$9 million, and if we are accused of being responsive to that request, then we stand accused.

MR. MAR: Guilty.

MR. DAY: Right. Call us guilty. If we are accused, as apparently we are, of being requested to speed up the development of the north/south corridor, since there were appearing to be resources of some \$25 million, and we actually listened to that, saw that we had the ability to do it: guilty. We're guilty, Mr. Speaker. Indeed we are. And we are accused, for instance, of responding to the federal government, which we don't always do but in this case did, related to \$60 million for human tissue and blood services, of which \$30 million was for Alberta's share of the transition cost for the new Canadian Blood Services agency: guilty. We're guilty. Call us guilty. And another \$30 million upon request of the federal government for Alberta's share of financial assistance to the hep C victims, which their federal cousins are not assisting pre-86: we are guilty. Guilty as accused.

4:30

Once again, Mr. Speaker, for these terrible, terrible crimes we indeed stand guilty. For advancing dollars relating to the settlement of legal claims through Family and Social Services, that expense being recorded at the end of the '97-98 year, for that, yes, call us guilty. And for all these references to poor planning, if we use \$16 billion as a very rough, approximate figure in terms of government spending and we add up this spending, we now stand guilty of a percentage of about 2 and a half percent of our budget. Yes, we have advanced 2 and a half percent of our budget to meet the needs of health and infrastructure and people who have come to us, all of whom were saying: we didn't see these various things, but isn't it exciting that we have the capacity to handle them?

So for an appropriation of approximately 2 and a half percent

of our budget we stand guilty as accused, and I would move second reading with the guilt that goes along with it, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 49 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order. We're dealing with Bill 44, the Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 1998. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

MR. SAPERS: I understood, Madam Chairman, that we were actually dealing with Bill 47 and not the Tax Statutes Amendment Act.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Bill 47. It's Monday.

Bill 47
Protection from Second-hand Smoke in
Public Buildings Amendment Act, 1998

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I believe there is an amendment that is still being debated on this, and I'd like to speak to that amendment.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Right. Amendment A1.

MS BLAKEMAN: Essentially the amendment is around what we would commonly call whistle-blower protection. It's interesting that this amendment is in fact putting back the exact wording that existed in this act when it was first passed 12 months ago. [interjection] Nope. I'm not putting forward the amendment. Everybody's got it. It was put forward before.

In this amendment act one of the things that has been removed is this whistle-blower protection. A couple of other things that have changed from the original act and are removed by this amendment act are the requirements for employers to ensure compliance and removal of the fines to employers for failing to ensure compliance. So we've lost three things out of that original bill. I question the wisdom of that, because what is left then? Individual responsibility, of course, but that may not always work. Therefore, I think you're leaving vulnerable a sector of your workforce; that is, any employees who would like to be bringing forward evidence or notation on lapses in the act being enforced or followed. There's no question that Bill 47 removes that protection for employees reporting any contraventions.

I understand that whistle-blower protection is a risk for this government. There's no question it does protect and empower employees, and I know that's a risk for this government. It empowers the employees to point out deficiencies in their workplace, it empowers employees to report contraventions of this act and other acts, and it empowers employees to bring forward concerns on how taxpayer money is spent. So I understand the reluctance this government has to enforce any kind of whistle-blower protection. It's a risk, yes, but it might save this government some grief. There's no point in putting in this

amendment act and then not having it work. I think the first time I spoke to this bill, I spoke of the hypocrisy that is noted around where smoking is allowed and where it isn't. The members of this Legislature, certainly the members on the government side, are able to enjoy a greater freedom in their choice of where to smoke than employees in the departments are. There's an inequity and an imbalance there, and it's seen as hypocrisy. It's seen as flaunting a power that the members of the Legislature enjoy that the employees do not. So I would have thought that the whistle-blower protection would have been a small price to pay, a small offering to make sure that this bill did what it was intended to do or did what I hoped it was intended to do.

I know that my Liberal colleagues have spoken in favour of other proposals offering whistle-blower protection. Edmonton-Gold Bar, for instance, presented Bill 207 in the last spring sitting, so we took the risk. I know that the government has taken the risk in the past, so there is precedence for doing this. There was quite clearly whistle-blower protection incorporated into the Protection for Persons in Care Act. No question that that's exactly what it is. It spells out that any employee that brings forward or points out a contravention under that act will definitely not be subject to any sanctions.

So I wonder why and I haven't really heard an explanation as to why those three clauses that were in the original legislation disappeared. Of course, I'm particularly interested in why the whistle-blower protection disappeared. Why? What possible reason could the government have? The risk had already been taken. It had already been accepted. The act was passed. Any concerns or any sticks and stones that might have been thrown or names called towards the government would have been weathered. It was passed. What on earth was the reasoning for now going back into this act and taking that whistle-blower protection out? That doesn't make sense to me, and I haven't heard an explanation of that. [interjections] Well, yes, I hear some people saying that the government doesn't believe in whistle-blower protection, but it has put it in some legislation. So it's proved it's capable of doing it, and I challenge the government to do it again.

I am disappointed that this has happened in this amendment act, and as I say, I haven't really heard any explanation for why. But with the amendment on the floor we are offering the government the opportunity to correct this, to show that it was an oversight, to show that it was an accidental omission, that that white-out bottle just got away from them. They could support this amendment, and I do urge them to support this amendment. Even being a smoker I would like to see this legislation work. I have a concern that this legislation will not work and will not have the support of the people, so I do urge my colleagues opposite to support the amendment as put forward.

Thank you very much.

4:40

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton -- for Calgary-Buffalo. Sorry.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I'll tell you, with the number of times, Madam Chairman, that my constituency boundaries have been redrawn, it's only a matter of time before I move in beside Edmonton-Centre here.

Madam Chairman, a couple of observations I wanted to make. In terms of the amendment that's been put forward, I couldn't help but find it interesting that when the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services stood in the Assembly on November 19 -- now, here's a longtime member of the Assembly. In fact,

I remember when he sat almost beside me as a member of the New Democrat caucus, when I guess he had some more radical views than he has currently as a front bencher on the government side. But I remember that on those occasions when the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services chose to rise in the Assembly, it was usually something he'd given a lot of thought to. So imagine my mystification when I heard the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services rise on November 19, 1998, speaking to the amendment. It was an exciting occasion because we thought we were going to hear some really trenchant analysis on the bill and hopefully some reason why it was going to be supported. Madam Chairman and members, I was tremendously disappointed we didn't hear that.

Let me tell you what the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services did share with us. Now, members, this is the minister's intervention on a bill which had already been dealt with in the House when it came in as Bill 205. It had received lots of interest and a lot of support from all quarters. That bill contained in section 9(1):

- No employer shall
- (a) dismiss or threaten to dismiss an employee,
 - (b) discipline or suspend an employee,
 - (c) impose any penalty upon an employee, or
 - (d) intimidate or coerce an employee,
- for the sole reason that an employee acting in good faith, has reported or proposes to report a contravention or possible contravention of this Act.

Then it imposed a penalty.

So what did the minister have to say about that? What was his contribution to the debate on November 19? Well, it was one short paragraph. I count I think about 12 lines in *Hansard*. When he finally got to saying what he was going to say, he said this:

I would say to the House that I ask their support in defeating this amendment, simply because it's frivolous, it's silly, and it does not do anything to enhance the intent of the bill.

One might ask: did we hear the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services raise such concerns when Bill 205 was being debated? I went back through *Hansard* to see if he was similarly offended when it had come forward in a private member's bill. Now, I may have missed it. I maybe didn't look carefully enough or spend enough time looking through his comments, but as hard as I looked and as long as I looked, I was unable to find any suggestion by the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services that this was a frivolous idea, that it was a silly idea, that it did nothing to enhance the intent of the bill. So then I think to myself: now, why is it that the minister, who would always have had the ultimate responsibility to in effect enforce the bill and implement it, when he sees something come back that had already received support in this Assembly, would now find that it was frivolous and silly?

That gives me another kind of concern, because that suggests to me that in fact the minister is not sympathetic to the purpose of this bill or of the intent of it. It suggests to me that in fact the minister is hostile not just to the idea of whistle-blower protection but to the entire bill. Otherwise, why would he object to this very straightforward amendment?

It occurs to me that sometimes we lose sight of this enormous power imbalance that exists in this place. We've got men and women who work in the Legislative Assembly. We have pages who spend half days in high school and the rest of the time working in here, afternoons and evenings. We've got researchers, we've got librarians, we've got policy analysts, we've got media and communications people, and we have secretaries. All of those people are subject, really, to the decisions made by elected members. This is, I suspect, a bit of an unusual workplace

setting, because there may be individual MLAs that will from time to time -- maybe they just do this in other Assemblies -- assert themselves and suggest that they're in some sort of managerial position in terms of the people that work here. I think that if you have 83 potential supervisors or bosses who are going around all too anxious -- not that all members would do this, but you'd have some members go around -- it would be easy to bully people who work in this precinct, in this environment. So it's not just, in my respectful submission, an ordinary work environment, like working in an insurance company or in a bank or something like that. It's not always clear who wields the power. If you're a researcher working in an office and you antagonize or disagree with a single MLA, I know some people would wonder whether that means their job is somehow in jeopardy or in peril.

That seems to me to be a characteristic which is relatively unique to the Legislative Assembly, and it seems to me that whistle-blower protection is a good protection in most legislation. I think that when we're dealing with the Legislative Assembly, it's particularly important, and I think it would be extremely unfortunate if we lost that provision. It was one of the attractive elements when we had seen the old Bill 205. I spoke in favour of it, and many others did. I voted in favour of it, and many others did. It just seems to me that it's something we simply shouldn't take out so quickly. For the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services to simply say that it's frivolous and silly and does nothing to enhance the intent of the bill, that suggests to me not only that he doesn't understand the kind of power imbalance that exists in this precinct in this place, but it also suggests to me that he's not a keen supporter of the purpose of the bill.

Madam Chairman, there are some elected people who, I guess, have a sense that they're sort of sovereign entities, each of them. It seems to me that that would be a good reason to have whistle-blower protection. It's not like it doesn't exist in any other statutes. In the bill that the Premier is so proud of, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, a bill that we've had occasion to talk about today in question period, there's provision there in section 77 that

- an employee of a public body may disclose to the Commissioner any information that the employee is required to keep confidential and that the employee, acting in good faith, believes
- (a) ought to be disclosed.

There's further provision in 77(4) that "an employee is not liable to a prosecution for an offence," and there must be no adverse employment action taken against an employee acting in good faith for disclosing information to the commissioner. I think this was part of the original Bill 18 in the spring session of 1994. If it was good enough to incorporate section 77 in 1994 -- and that received majority support in the House from government and opposition benches -- then why would it be that this amendment presents any difficulty to the government?

4:50

Madam Chairman, there may be people who underestimate how intimidating MLAs can be. You know, there may well be employees quivering at the prospect that an MLA may come up to them and speak to them in a stern tone. I can just imagine you may have somebody who's absolutely horrified at the prospect that an MLA in this Assembly might come up and speak crossly to them. So why would they expect they could raise with impunity a concern that they wanted protection from secondhand smoke and that people were not respecting the designated smoking areas or what have you? We wouldn't want those people to be cowed or to feel in any way that they're bullied. So we have this very

innocent amendment, and it seems to me that we shouldn't have to see any government employee reduced to a state of near terror at the thought of raising -- well, there may be some members who think I exaggerate, but how many Assembly employees do we have in this precinct? I mean, we must have hundreds. Look at that Annex over there. It's -- what is it? -- 10 storeys tall, and it's full of people working largely for us, largely for MLAs. I've been in there and I've talked with some of those staff after they've met with some of us, and they're pretty intimidated by some of the people in this Chamber. Some of the people. I wouldn't point a finger at any particular member.

I'd invite members to survey some of the people who work around here, to ask some of the people who work in the Annex if they're a little bit intimidated by any of the people who work in this building. I was going to say that you could ask one of the secretaries who works for me, but they've all left. But, Madam Chairman, I think we might want to do a bit of a survey.

MR. HANCOCK: You were blowing smoke at them.

MR. DICKSON: The minister of intergovernmental affairs, quick as usual, has offered a helpful suggestion in terms of doing a bit of an inventory, and I'd be happy to work with him in putting together a bit of a questionnaire. We could distribute it. We could have sort of red question boxes scattered in the Annex, in the rotunda.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Let's get back to the amendment.

MR. DICKSON: Well, what we're talking about, Madam Chairman, is that we could do that for a week, and the question of the day is . . . [interjections] Lots of help here. I can see that a lot of people are giving careful consideration to this amendment, and that's encouraging. It's encouraging to me, and I think it's going to be encouraging to those people who would like to see one of the key features in Bill 205 brought back into Bill 47. And we can do it.

The other thing is that I've gone through the debate we've had on Bill 47 in terms of finding out why anybody would oppose this. We've had two speakers from the government side. The one speaker dismisses it as silly and frivolous, notwithstanding the fact that it's another legislation, the whistle-blower protection, and I'm referring to the amendment A1. Then the other speaker was our friend from Medicine Hat, the esteemed government whip, who stood up -- his main contribution to this debate, in fact his sole contribution to this debate was standing to say that it was erroneous to suggest he had supported whistle-blower protection when it had come forward as this member's private member's bill back in 1995 or whenever it was. He was anxious to say on record that he did not support whistle-blower protection and he does not now.

Well, Madam Chairman, neither of those interventions by government members give you and me a real understanding in terms of why they would vote against this amendment. So perhaps this afternoon in the time we have left the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, perhaps, or the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View will stand and offer some specific reason. I'd expect that on a bill like this the chair of the health planning standing policy committee, who's heard a lot of keen representations from the tobacco reduction lobby, would have some insight on the bill, and maybe she could share that with us.

Madam Chairman, I would like to give opportunity to government members to set out some concrete reasons, not spurious reasons but some substantial reasons, why they would not be prepared to see the whistle-blower protection put forward.

[interjection] The minister for intergovernmental affairs continues to offer advice, but he's so far away that I can't hear all the nuggets, all of the gems that he's providing us with. So hopefully he'll get a chance to stand in his place in a moment and offer an explanation. I'm waiting to hear -- I brought two pens in case one fades on me while I'm halfway through a good suggestion. I'm going to be anxious to mark those comments down as we hear them, and then we can at least debate this on the merits.

So far, Madam Chairman, this is a bit of a one-sided debate, and I know that no member in this Assembly, the minister of intergovernmental affairs chief among them, would want to vote against a bill like this that's remedial and positive without having taken the time to explain to his or her constituents in *Hansard* what the reason would be why they would oppose this amendment. There are people who will want to know how members are going to vote but more importantly why. I'm looking forward to those comments and those suggestions.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder. Oh, the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross. I'm sorry.

MR. WHITE: I'm in no hurry. Actually, I'd much prefer to hear from the government why not.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

MRS. FRITZ: No. Go ahead.

MR. WHITE: Go ahead. Go ahead.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Chivalry is not dead. Carry on, Edmonton-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Following that learned scholar in the area of whistle-blower rights, my hon. colleague from Calgary-Buffalo, I too have some instrument for recording some gems and some nuggets. Although I'm much less creative than he, I have a highlight marker here. Just in case there's something that pops to mind from the other side, I can make due note of it to make sure that we don't miss this in the future.

I'd like to add my small bit of debate here, recognizing that I'm one of those that doesn't really give a darn whether someone smokes or doesn't smoke in the office. So long as it's not to the extent that it stinks up my clothes, I don't really care, but this amendment is not for me. This whole bill is not for me. This is for all the other people that either have quit or are trying to quit smoking or are simply allergic to it or for whatever reason do not enjoy having that and, quite frankly, can't function with second-hand smoke being about.

5:00

Now, I don't have a great deal to add, except to say: look; when you pass laws such as these, it's in favour of the minority, and that minority in this case, as the bill outlines, is a case of one. Now, one person can be intimidated a great deal by the majority whether that majority in fact is a cabinet minister or a member of the Legislature or a boss. That happens all the time. It's a subtle form of coercion, and it may be a subtle form of suspension or disciplinary action or some totally unrelated action that really, really, really cannot, even with this amendment, be picked up and acted upon.

It's that kind of thing that we shouldn't have to legislate, but if

you do put it in the legislation and you do include this amendment in the bill, what it says is that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable. That's what it says almost in entirety. It doesn't say that it won't occur, because certainly it will. That kind of soft coercion, as we say, it's the subtle wink wink, nod nod, nudge nudge: it's her fault that we have to go outside here; it's her fault that we have to go out of this room to have a butt now and again, or it's his fault that we are forced to remove ourselves when we feel that we have the right to do this.

Well, the fact is that the change in the intent of the majority of the population over the last year has softened, has changed quite a bit, to the extent that we now do collectively recognize that blowing smoke in someone's face in the workplace is simply not acceptable. All this amendment does is put a little teeth into that to say: "Look; these lungs are mine. I have the right to say that I don't like living and working in this environment, and I have a right to complain without fear of repercussion, whether it be dismissal, suspension, disciplinary action, or threat of any of those above."

Madam Chairman, I think I have made my point and will, then, take my seat and allow the Member for Calgary-Cross, if I can get your attention, to stand up.

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to speak to this amendment, the whistle-blower amendment that was put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview. As I reflected and listened to the comments made by the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I have to say at the beginning of this debate that I quite frankly don't feel that employees in this building are intimidated. They're not intimidated by myself as an MLA.

I also don't feel that this is a simple amendment, the whistle-blower protection amendment that's been put forward. In fact it's so significant that as Liberals you've had it before the House in the past as an act, the Whistleblower Protection Act.

I read *Hansard* and thought about this issue in a very serious way, about whether or not to support the amendment, but when I thought about the previous act that had come forward, my understanding of that act was that it was to expand the mechanism by which a public service employee would be able to bring a matter that they consider to be very serious, a wrongdoing, as I understood it, to the direct attention of the Ombudsman. But I thought the act also went further in that the investigation powers of the Ombudsman were actually expanded. There was a great deal of debate about that, but when the Whistleblower Protection Act came forward, it had also affected a number of departments and a number of acts. I'd like to read those into *Hansard* as to what my recollections were. I jotted them down as you were speaking.

The acts were the Public Service Act, the Public Service Employee Relations Act, the Legislative Assembly Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Ombudsman Act. The number of departments involved were the office of the Ombudsman -- as I said, you were seeking to look at expanding investigation powers -- the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Department of Labour, the Department of Justice and Attorney General, as well as the personnel administration office.

I would invite you to bring that forward once again as an act, just as we see legislation come forward to this Assembly and come back again and, yes, maybe even a third time, just as we are with this bill through this amendment that is before us today.

Now, I also understood when you were speaking that you felt that there wasn't any protection for employees and that there

weren't any steps that employees could take if they believed there was a situation of wrongdoing unless they had another step. I can only reflect on where I had worked as an employee previously for a number of years. I know that if there was ever any situation where you as an employee felt there was wrongdoing, you could take that directly to your supervisor. You could approach your supervisor with that, and in fact if there was a legitimate concern, approaching management directly, I always felt, was the most efficient way of addressing the issue. Often you'd achieve results by doing that.

If you did approach a department and you felt the way in which the complaint was being handled was unfair or that unjust action was taken against that employee, then there are steps which the employees can take, and those steps are already in place. I speak to that, too, knowing that employees often do take those steps. For example, the unionized employees have a collective agreement between the union and an institution. Part of that outlines a grievance procedure as well as their arbitration board, and all non-union or opted-out employees use a similar procedure through an appeal panel appointed by the personnel administration office. The appeal panel is made up of public service employees from other departments or agencies in order to ensure the greatest degree of objectivity.

Employees may also take their concerns to the provincial Ombudsman, and the Ombudsman, as you said previously, is an objective party. Their role is to investigate any action, decision, or recommendation made, including any recommendations made to a minister relating to a matter of administration and affecting any person or body of persons in his or her personal capacity or by any department agency.

So, Madam Chairman, there is currently protection for employees in the system through a number of procedures. Fair and adequate mechanisms already exist under the Ombudsman Act, the Public Service Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act. For these reasons I'd urge the Assembly not to support this whistle-blower amendment.

I'm wrapping it up. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton -- or Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Chairman, you really want to move me further north. That would be the end of the Calgary caucus, Madam Chairman, the opposition caucus.

Firstly, I wanted to thank the Member for Calgary-Cross. We now have for the first time in the debate on this bill at the committee stage somebody responding to the merits of the amendment. I appreciate that immensely, and I know my colleagues do.

Just three quick comments. The first one is: I never for the slightest moment ever suggested that any employee would be intimidated by the Member for Calgary-Cross. I expect she's a delight to work for and to work with. My point is that I have spoken with employees who work in the Annex who are intimidated by certain members. I'm not naming names. I'm just saying that there are people here who can be very strong personalities, and my concern is for those employees.

This is not a backdoor attempt to bring in whistle-blower protection on a general basis.

AN HON. MEMBER: There goes the Minister of Justice.

MR. DICKSON: Somebody perhaps could assist the Minister of Justice. I think secondhand smoke has overwhelmed him there in his seat. He's looking faint.

This isn't a backdoor attempt to bring in a whole regime of whistle-blower protection. It's just to provide a complaint mechanism for employees in this one very limited context.

5:10

The third point is that the Member for Calgary-Cross said she thinks employees have other remedies. They can contact their manager or their supervisor. In any other employment context, that usually works very well. This is the most surreal work environment I can imagine. If there's anybody in this Assembly who thinks it's just like working in an insurance firm or a law firm or a school, please put your hand up. This is the most unusual work environment I've ever participated in and expect I ever will participate in. Now, maybe some other members, Madam Chairman, have worked in an environment like this, but believe me, this is the most unusual environment I can imagine, so I think it requires perhaps some special safeguards. Normally it's fine to go to a manager or a supervisor. I'm not sure that's the case here.

Those are the comments I wanted to make on the amendment, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Cross for staying. Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

[The clauses of Bill 47 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

**Bill 48
Election Amendment Act, 1998**

HON. MEMBERS: Question.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are you ready for the question?

[The clauses of Bill 48 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that the committee do now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following: Bill 47, Bill 48.

Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.
The Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move that the Assembly do now stand adjourned and reconvene this evening at 8 in Committee of the Whole.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]