

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 3, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/03/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of Albertans from Edmonton, from Jasper, from Sherwood Park, and from Spruce Grove urging

the Government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition of 112 Albertans from Jasper, St. Albert, Edmonton, and other parts of the province urging the government of Alberta

to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I wish to table sufficient copies of a petition here with 107 names reading

Whereas, excellence in public education is the cornerstone of our future, and students, parents, teachers and community volunteers are being exhausted by endless fundraising for basic educational materials and services;

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support of children in public and separate schools.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today I have the pleasure of filing with the Assembly letters of congratulation that I've written to the 87 members of Team Alberta who won gold, silver, or bronze medals during the first week of competition at the Canada Winter Games in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. I have copied these letters to the appropriate MLAs.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm tabling copies of my correspondence with the Government House Leader requesting a change in Standing Orders so that citizens can petition directly in this Assembly without having to change the wording of those petitions.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I have several tablings: one, basic precautions needed to avoid hantavirus, an information bulletin from Alberta Health; two, Hantavirus, from occupational health and safety, telling about the effects and how hantavirus can be contracted; third, an Alberta Health information bulletin talking to people in terms of how they can avoid hantavirus; and finally, the first case of hantavirus in southern Alberta is confirmed, a bulletin issued by Alberta Health.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite copies of a letter to table. The letter is from a concerned parent from Peers, Alberta. She is expressing deep concern about continuing chronic underfunding of education, and being a parent of four school-age children, she is urging this Assembly to increase funding so that schools have adequate resources to educate our children.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly five copies of a two-page executive summary of a survey conducted by Angus Reid with respect to attitudes towards same-sex couples, the result of which shows clearly that a vast majority of Canadians support extending benefits to same-sex couples and have a very high tolerance of the latter.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a memo from Alberta Municipal Affairs dated 1989. They are discussing the unsuitability of pine shakes as a roofing material.

Thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm also tabling five copies of a letter from the Leader of the Official Opposition to the president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons expressing her concern at the College of Physician and Surgeon's recent decision to review standards for long stay nonhospital surgical facilities.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is from Margaret Main. It's to the Premier, and she is asking him to reconsider the proposed Natural Heritage act.

The second is from Robin White. It is to the Minister of Environmental Protection, and it is outlining her concerns and dismay that under the Natural Heritage Act the potential for reduced protection of all environmentally sensitive areas will become a reality in this province.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today on behalf of the Member for Redwater I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly Ms Vanessa Belair, her parents, Ray and Theresa, and her siblings, Jessica, Seth,

and Jordan. Vanessa is the 1998 recipient of the Alberta 4-H program's highest honour, the Premier's award, and was chosen from 142 delegates across Alberta. Ms Belair has been an active member of the Gibbons light horse 4-H club for the past nine years. Along with holding numerous executive positions in her club, she participates in a great number of regional and provincial 4-H activities. Vanessa, joined by her family, will officially accept her award later this afternoon from the hon. Premier. I was further delighted when we chatted over lunch prior to question period about the fact that Vanessa is enrolled in the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry and Home Economics, University of Alberta. It made my day. Seeing that the family is standing in the members' gallery, I'd really ask this Assembly to give them the traditional warm welcome they so richly deserve.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly six people from the community of La Crête in my constituency. They are Dave Martens, Bill Kehler, Jake Fehr, Willy Neudorf, John Driedger, and Bill Neufeld. They were here this morning for a meeting with the Premier and stayed on to admire our building, and then they let me treat them to some of our Legislature cafeteria fare. I would like to ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a special duty to perform this afternoon. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Riverview I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 18 visitors from St. Martin Catholic school who are joining us in the public gallery. They are accompanied today by Mrs. Natalie Harasymiw, who is their teacher I believe. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister responsible for children's services.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's rare that I get to introduce people from my constituency, but today I have two wonderful young ladies who are seated in the public gallery. Michelle Kreutzer hails from Slave Lake. She's had to face a lot of adversity. She's seated up there in the public gallery. Along with her is Mary Ann Haduca, and Mary Ann hails from England. It's very important for these people to be welcomed by this Assembly, because it's rare that they come to the city to be able to be welcomed the way that they should be. I ask that they wave from where they're sitting to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly an aspiring third-year political science student at, of course, the premier university in the premier constituency in Alberta, the University of Calgary, and also a person who contributes greatly to the daily constituency matters of Calgary-Varsity. I would ask Jill Leese to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Education and career development is one of the high priorities of our government. Bow Valley College plays an important role in this area. Today I am very pleased to introduce to you and the Assembly a group of Albertans who are eager to charge ahead in their careers, 41 students from Bow Valley College and faculty members Ms Jeri Wylie-Smith, Ms Susan Jolliffe, and Ms Leona Rice. I would like to ask the group to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly a recent graduate from the Faculté Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, who did her degree in political science. Chantelle Hughes is a much cherished research volunteer on our staff. She's in the public gallery, and I'd ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development, who I understand has just returned from the dentist.

International Year of Older Persons

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As all Members of the Legislative Assembly know, 1999 has been declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Older Persons. The purpose of the year is that nations across the world can celebrate the unique and important contributions that seniors make to society. The theme of the year is Towards a Society for All Ages. This is a very appropriate theme as it urges people of all ages to work towards harmony between generations and to acknowledge the important role seniors play in the social, economic, and cultural development of societies.

This year has gotten off to a very auspicious start in our province. In October of 1998 our Premier joined with hundreds of seniors at a launch ceremony in Lethbridge. Since then our government has initiated a number of activities including an Internet bulletin board highlighting special activities and a comprehensive review of the impact of our aging population on the future of government programs and services for seniors. The Seniors Advisory Council, under the leadership of the Member for Calgary-West, has also embraced the spirit of the year and focused many of its projects and activities for 1999 on themes that fit this special global celebration.

Rather than discuss these government initiatives in detail, however, I want to draw members' attention to the work being done by communities across Alberta in making the International Year of Older Persons an unforgettable chapter in Alberta's history. As the International Year of Older Persons unfolds, we've already seen some innovative and successful programs launched to celebrate the year, from Bragg Creek in the south, where grade 7 students have worked with local seniors on an Internet site devoted to the histories of seniors in that community, to Fort McMurray in the north, where local businesses have come together to improve their services to seniors.

Seniors' organizations and community groups across Alberta have planned banquets, dances, discussion groups, educational programs, and other activities to promote the year and increase understanding of seniors and their contributions to Alberta, past and present. These contributions are substantial. Alberta seniors can reflect on a lifetime of service to the growth and prosperity of this province.

They know the sacrifices that war, depression, and natural disaster demand of a society. They know that prosperity must be earned and that devotion to family and community is the foundation of our province's success.

Mr. Speaker, seniors continue to make important contributions to Alberta today. They contribute to our economic growth, to the strength of our volunteer base, to our strong communities, to the development of our youth, to the strength of our cultural fabric, and to the shaping of public policy. They bring to all they do the experience and wisdom accumulated through lifetimes of hard work, and Alberta is a better place because of this.

On behalf of the government of Alberta I thank community leaders and seniors throughout the province for the spirit and energy they bring to making the International Year of Older Persons an unforgettable time in Alberta. I also want to acknowledge the leadership of Diane Osberg, Alberta's representative on the Canada co-ordinating committee for the year, and the members of Alberta's planning committee who have worked tirelessly to ensure the year is marked with distinction.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I urge all hon. members to do all they can to spread the word about the International Year of Older Persons and to bring an enhanced appreciation of seniors' perspectives to all of the work that they do.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Madam Minister. On the occasion of the United Nations International Year of Older Persons and on behalf of the Liberal Official Opposition, I would like to thank and acknowledge the contributions and sacrifices made by Alberta seniors to benefit their families, their communities, their province, and their country throughout the years.

We live in a time of relative prosperity and peace. In contrast, our parents and grandparents brought this province and this country through a depression and two world wars. We owe them a great deal. We have a lot to thank them for.

I have many senior citizens in my constituency, as do all the hon. members, and I speak to the seniors in Edmonton-Centre on a regular basis, and they are concerned, Mr. Speaker. Here in the province of Alberta, one of the most blessed provinces in Canada, here in the International Year of Older Persons, seniors are telling me and others that they are concerned, and some are even afraid. They are concerned that the once excellent public health care system that they built won't be here for them when they need it. They are concerned that the once excellent public education system that educated them and that they helped to build will not be there for their grandchildren to pass on the knowledge, values, and skills that we all cherish as Albertans.

I can think of no better way to honour our seniors than to protect and enhance the institutions and traditions that they have passed on to us for safekeeping. In a few days we will begin debate on Bill 207, the Seniors Benefit Statutes Amendment Act, 1999. This bill would return to all seniors the health care insurance premium exemption taken away from them five years ago. The bill would also index cash benefits to seniors on fixed or limited incomes to protect them against inflation.

Mr. Speaker, a public health care system they can count on, confidence in a bright future for their grandchildren, and a little financial help for them to get by on with expenses: in the International Year of Older Persons these things are the least we can do to say thank you very much to those who have given us so much.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Protected Ecological Areas

MRS. MACBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The practice of politics needs to be more than pitting one Albertan against another. Forest companies and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers have acknowledged that industrial activities are not appropriate in special places. CAPP and several major environmental groups last year proposed various tools that the government could use and adopt to facilitate the phaseout of the dispositions that exist in the special places. My questions are to the Premier. Is it the environmental policy of this government to pit industry and environmental advocates against each other?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, it's not. Relative to the policy as it relates to the act that has been introduced by the hon. Minister of Environmental Protection, I'll have him supplement. Relative to the activities of the energy industry as it relates to protected places, I will have the hon. Minister of Energy reply.

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's true that CAPP and a couple of other groups did sign an agreement, but that's really very interesting. You know, you've got two parties that it's not going to cost one penny to sign an agreement, but it is going to cost the government. We weren't even asked to participate in that agreement. So I find it very interesting that that member continues to bring this kind of thing up. I know it's the Liberal philosophy to just pour out money and not have any accountability to it, but the fact is that the forestry industry and the oil and gas industry have not offered up one square inch, not one square inch. Yes, they've come forward and said: we'll give it to you as long as you give us back equal. That isn't giving, and if the industry is really that concerned about it, well, then maybe they should come to the table and give instead of asking for a replacement.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, on the energy side, I said yesterday that to insinuate that the energy industry isn't working with environmentalists and the environmental community for the protection of these areas is strictly wrong. Let me give you some examples of the new technologies that are out there that have been developed over the past decade to work with environmentalists on the issues of entrance into environmental areas.

First, longer distance horizontal wells and directional drilling allows access from a single pad and allows them to move out into the zones without actually being in the ecological reserve or perhaps in the park. Therefore, we can put a mile to a mile and a half out underneath right into the zone without touching the environmental surface at all. We have increased heat efficiency and electricity from cogeneration, which is reducing emissions. I mean, we know that today the companies are working together -- the environmentalists are there -- on the emissions from cogeneration electricity.

3-D seismic allows better pinpointing of the targets. Now they don't blast away in holes. They can go right to the resource, and they don't disturb as much of the environment. Passive, reduced-impact seismic reduces the impact of long, straight cutlines. There isn't a need to make those huge cutlines any longer.

Flare reduction. We're looking at higher efficiency stack design and on-site small electric generators which will cut down the amount of emissions coming out of oil and gas developments.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: why, after that display, is the government refusing time after time to provide the leadership that Albertans want and need on this issue?

MR. KLEIN: Well, we are, Mr. Speaker, providing the leadership. As the hon. Minister of Environmental Protection pointed out, if an oil company or a forestry company comes to either the Minister of Energy or the Minister of Environmental Protection or to me and says to me or to this government or to the Liberal opposition, "We will give you this land," we would gladly accept it. Gladly accept it.

That is leadership, Mr. Speaker. There is a role to be played on the part of industry. If they want to offer up the land, we will take it. We will take it gladly, and we will protect it and preserve it. I think that would be a marvelous gesture.

Relative to the process, I'll have the hon. Minister of Energy respond as to how that can be done.

Speaker's Ruling Brevity

THE SPEAKER: With all due respect, we've now gone five minutes on this particular subject matter. The subject in this part of the Routine is question period, not answer period.

Protected Ecological Areas (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why does the government expect industry to make all the sacrifices when it is in fact industry that is acknowledging the need to move out of the environmentally sensitive areas?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I reiterate my answer. That is, if the industry wants to forgive and forgo that land, they're perfectly entitled to do so. As a matter of fact, we would consider that to be a very generous gesture.

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

Energy and Utilities Board

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second questions today are to the Minister of Energy. To what does the minister attribute the loss of 550 person-years of experience at the Energy and Utilities Board in 1997?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, somebody did say it here, but excellent management, a better restructured system. The output in 1997 of the EUB was unbelievable. They did over 22,000 licence examinations. We had close to 14,000 wells put into the ground in that year, and they got them out on pinpoint timing. We had occurrences that happened out of 22,000 wells, about 22 hearings. It's unbelievable the amount that were actually contested before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. That's how efficient they were.

Now, in retrospect, today with those 550 to 600 people that are working there, this year they may only profile some 7,000 wells, and their licences will be down probably 15,000. So there is adequate personnel there, and they're being redirected by a new chairman, Mr. Neil McCrank, who will be redirecting to look at environmental issues and issues that impact the land use with owners of land, aboriginal groups, and other sensitive areas in the province of Alberta. I can just say that great management has allowed us to do this.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does the minister agree that the loss

of a very valuable staff component at the board is impairing their ability to serve the energy industry and the people of this province in an efficient and timely manner?

DR. WEST: Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

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

Child and Family Services Authorities

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 1 the child and family services authorities assume full responsibility for delivering children's services in Alberta. Apparently nine of the newly established authorities are experiencing budgetary deficits or at least expecting them before their business plans ever take effect. The Edmonton region is apparently forecasting a \$10 million deficit and is considering the number of clients that it can assist. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier confirm that the funding formula was designed as a cost saving exercise regardless of the impact on children?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. The whole children's initiative and the regionalization, the authorities that are to come in place on April 1 are really to bring the services closer to the people and to get those who know the situation best involved as best as they possibly can.

Relative to the financial issues surrounding the regionalization, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond and perhaps the minister responsible for children's services.

2:00

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The funding formula was something that was worked on by experts in the field. The funding formula consists of things such as low-income children, aboriginal children, variables of single children. This is something the regional authorities talked about, something the regional authorities looked at, and, even more importantly, something the regional authorities accepted.

Mr. Speaker, the other key component to what she asked is on the budget issues, and the only answer that I can give her to that is: budget day is March 11.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, before they even open, half of them are carrying deficits, so the question is: is the Premier going to, one, increase funding; two, decrease services; or three, tell the authorities to run deficits? Which one is it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the whole exercise is to enhance services for children. Because this is a matter of process, relative to the regionalization, I'm going to have the minister responsible for children's services respond and bring this Assembly up to date as to how the regionalization is proceeding.

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to respond to that. As a matter of fact, we have finalized the appointments to the boards. The boards are now just doing the business plan process, which is a very important and key component of what's going to happen in terms of funding. The funding model that we have applied has dealt with it from a perspective of making sure that no authority gets less than what they get in the third quarter. We are going to ensure that whatever happens, additional funding will be allocated according to the needs mentioned by the various meetings we've had with the authorities. I know my hon. colleague in Family and Social Services has made sure that he's looking into that matter

even more strenuously as we move towards the transition phase.

Very, very important, Mr. Speaker, is that this process is to ensure that the communities are going to be starting to take over and look after the issue of children, and this happens in April. We are still just in the process of transition, which means that we have a lot of issues that we have to deal with and make sure that whatever we do is going to make service delivery for children even better.

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

Sexual Orientation

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I was encouraged to read this morning that most Albertans oppose continued discrimination against gay and lesbian Albertans. However, I must say that I was a bit distressed to find out that the government is more interested in managing this issue from a public relations standpoint than from a standpoint of justice and fairness. Given the reluctance of the government to face this issue, I wonder if the Premier will agree to appointing an all-party committee to consult Albertans and examine whether same-sex couples should have equal rights and obligations under the law.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we'll be dealing with this issue on March 18 as a government caucus. It's an issue that we can't run from, and it's an issue that's going to be around 200 or 300 years down the road no matter what we do.

You know, this is a newspaper article: Canadians divided over same-sex benefits, poll finds. The polling in Alberta has been just about the same. It's a very difficult issue to deal with, but I would like to know what the position is of the Liberal Party and the ND Party. I'll ask the question. [interjection] No. What is their position on gay marriages? What is their position on gay adoptions? What is their position on gay foster parenting? What is their position on same-sex benefits? What is their position on common-law couples who are of the same sex?

You know, they ask the questions; they have never, never provided an answer. They will not answer it in this Legislature, Mr. Speaker, so perhaps the people up there can ask the question: what is their position? We know, honestly, that this government caucus is going to face those issues head-on on March 18, but I ask the opposition parties: help us with this and put their position on the table.

MS BARRETT: Well, I hope the Premier will read the stuff that I filed today. I'm sure he'll be encouraged that most Canadians favour . . . [interjections] Oh, absolutely, I will. Most Canadians favour protecting gays and lesbians against discrimination.

Let me again ask the Premier: rather than just the governing caucus determining future legislative action, can he explain why it is that he would be opposed to an all-party committee making those recommendations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it doesn't matter whether it's a one-party committee, an all-party committee. As a matter of fact we have an all-party committee right here in this Legislature. Right here in this Legislature. When I spoke to the United Alternative, I said: there is a moral compass. There is a moral compass, and I would like to know where the moral compass is over there. They ask the questions. They never provide the answers. Where does the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition stand on these particular issues. Help us. Just send her thoughts and her ideas across the floor. Right? As we develop our policy, we will include her thoughts and the thoughts of

others in that caucus relative to this very difficult issue. State your position. Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, stand up and state your position.

MS BARRETT: Does that mean that I'm allowed to state mine? I know my position.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier this.

AN HON. MEMBER: What is it?

MS BARRETT: Oh, absolutely for protection, completely for protection against discrimination.

May I ask the Premier this? Another Supreme Court decision . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, the chair has recognized the hon. leader of the NDP opposition, and it is the norm to speak through the chair.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, what I was trying to ask the Premier is this: given that there is likely another Supreme Court decision to be handed down on a matter related to domestic arrangements some time during the next week, maybe two weeks, will the Premier at least agree to hold Bill 12 until after that decision is made just in case the whiteout is needed on that legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question as it was framed requires a legal answer. Basically in terms of legislation we are dealing with the Domestic Relations Act, and the maintenance act. It's a question of law, and I will have the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General respond.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Premier. The case to which the hon. ND opposition leader is referring is, I believe, M and H, if I'm not mistaken. We do anticipate that decision coming out in the very near future. We can certainly raise with caucus whether or not we should withhold Bill 12 pending that decision coming out.

However there is some difficulty, Mr. Speaker, and it's this: when the Taylor and Rossu decision came out, basically the courts advised the Legislature that they had to amend the Domestic Relations Act by, I believe, June 16, and we're obligated to do so. Otherwise certain portions of the act will be held to be unconstitutional. That's one of the reasons why we've proceeded with respect to responding to that particular decision.

As I also indicated yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I'm in the process of gathering some thoughts and information from other ministers regarding the whole issue of common-law relationships and how that impacts the definition of spouse in our legislation. I anticipate coming forward to caucus probably not in the really near future but hopefully sometime in the short-term future, because it's a complex issue. We'll bring forward some recommendations in that regard.

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

Teachers' Collective Bargaining

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night teachers in Calgary voted to take a strike vote. Can the Minister of Labour explain to the House and for the benefit of the parents and children worried about the possible effects of a strike: what is the process leading up to the strike vote?

2:10

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Naturally we're all con-

cerned about any labour disruption in the province of Alberta. We can point out two events that started yesterday evening. The agreement between the two parties expired on August 31, 1998. The teachers rejected a board offer in November of 1998. They then made joint application for a mediator to Alberta Labour. A mediator was appointed on December 3, 1998. There were a number of mediated meetings between December and January, and a no-recommendation report was released February 9. What this means is that the parties were sufficiently far apart in meetings that the mediator chaired that he felt that he could write no recommendation.

So last night the members of this particular bargaining unit gave their negotiating committee approval to take a strike vote. There are a number of teachers in this caucus and indeed yourself, Mr. Speaker, who probably know more about this process than I do with respect to the ATA. The next step would be for the ATA to make application to the Labour Relations Board for a supervised vote. The length of time from this strike vote being taken and the executive being charged with the ability to move towards a strike vote is 120 days. The process itself takes about 10 days to process and approve the application for a strike vote. A strike cannot occur without this supervised vote, and even if teachers should vote to strike, they must provide 72 hours worth of notice.

Of course, the Department of Labour encourages both parties back to the bargaining table. A negotiated settlement is always the best settlement. There were certainly some creative steps taken by two parties that both wanted to make a deal in the last go-round in negotiations in Calgary public.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Teachers in Calgary are doing a good job despite their labour/budget difficulties.

Could the minister describe the status of bargaining across the province between school boards and the Alberta Teachers' Association?

MR. SMITH: Much more quickly, Mr. Speaker, 34 school boards across Alberta have reached a collective agreement with teachers for the current school year. This is 55 percent of the school districts, 51 percent of Alberta teachers, 11 collective agreements, 15 percent of school divisions covering almost 27 percent of teachers already in place for '99-2000.

School boards and teachers, Mr. Speaker, continue to use the collective bargaining process effectively, although I find quite often in the marketplace, where we're continuing to turnout a number of teachers through the universities, we're also continuing to have experienced teachers in our system, and we continue to find that when two parties are ready to find negotiated settlements, good things often occur as a result of that process.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Minister of Education. What makes the Calgary situation seem to be so different?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, there's an opinion request in there so keep it brief.

MR. MAR: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I think the Calgary board of education review last year helped identify some of the areas that demonstrate where the Calgary board is different from other parts of the province. First of all, it has a higher percentage of students needing English as a Second Language. Secondly, a higher proportion of Calgary board of education teachers are at the higher end of the salary grid because of their levels of experience and their education.

Mr. Speaker, from the province's point of view the funding

framework provides per student funding for basic instruction and then additional funding to recognize the needs of the Calgary board such as for English as a Second Language. We are currently reviewing the funding framework to make sure that it continues to allocate dollars in a way that treats all boards fairly.

To the credit of the Calgary board, Mr. Speaker, they are taking steps themselves to address some of these issues as well; as an example, an early retirement program that was optional and voluntary. Secondly, a human resource strategy that includes a larger number of more recent graduates in the hiring of new teachers for the school will help introduce a greater balance in their workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I'll just conclude by saying that the commitment of the CBE and its employees to the commitment that they have to students is one way that we hope will help ensure that the two sides will agree on a new contract quickly.

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

Pine Shake Roofing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

- 1) We have no third party . . . inspection . . .
- 2) We have little or no inspections of the work done by roofers . . .
- 3) We have no grading criteria included in the Code . . .
- 4) We have no research data to substantiate the support we have given to the use of Pine Shingles and Shakes.

These aren't my words. They are the words of a Deputy Minister of Labour. My first question is to the Minister of Labour. Why were untreated pine shakes allowed on 30,000 or more Alberta homes when the Deputy Minister of Labour knew that there was no research data to substantiate their use?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, we have talked earlier. I think it was Oscar Wilde who once said that if you continue to tell the truth, for sure sooner or later someone will find you out. I think that's what's happened.

We continue to make what we have available. We have facts here about alleged statements of a deputy minister. On March 1, 1999, the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar tabled the document now referred to as sessional paper 106/99. In later questions he talked about a document released by the Department of Economic Development. Then he went on to accuse me of an action which you deemed to be inappropriate.

We have tabled four binders of information on pine shakes. One of those referenced on March 1, Mr. Speaker, contained the same document that the member tabled then. We just find that either the member is less interested in the issue than he professes, terribly confused, or has for some reason with willful intention delivered documents to the House whose authenticity we can't confirm.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is also to the Minister of Labour. Given that the minister claims that the government, his government, doesn't get involved in testing products, how does he explain the 1995 government project entitled long-term testing of treated and untreated pine shakes, a test that we haven't even gotten the results of.

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, you know, we're so unsure now of what the member talks about that we'll have to take the documents, the control. We'll have to go through a process that we wouldn't have to if we could take his word for it, but earlier actions have indicated that we can't.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is also to the Minister of Labour. Given that the minister is fond of talking about national testing, how does he explain a letter to Alberta Labour from the Canadian Construction Materials Centre that states:

The evidence provided concerning the performance of pine shakes are not strong enough. The CMHC survey upon which such evidence is based is not technically significant. Many of the buildings surveyed were barns and sheds.

Explain, please.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the only document the member has tabled today is one from July 18, 1989. Surely in conversation with the Leader of the Opposition, who was in cabinet at that time, he might be able to find out those answers. I know not of what he speaks.

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

Child Prostitution

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Last week you tabled the number of children apprehended under the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. The figures sounded encouraging. Can you tell me: is this act truly making a difference?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that I feel this act is making a tremendous difference. Up until this date, from February 1 to February 28, or a month after proclamation of this bill, we have seen 26 young prostitutes being taken into protective custody. What this enables us to do is attempt to break the cycle that the pimps and johns have put these young girls in.

Mr. Speaker, it's especially discouraging when you take a look and one of these young ladies that was picked up is 12 years old. My daughter is that age, and I just find that absolutely atrocious, but it is out there. We feel that this legislation is doing its job and in many ways is doing its job better than we had even anticipated.

2:20

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the same minister: is 72 hours enough time to adequately treat these children and encourage them to leave the streets?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, 72 hours under the Child Welfare Act is all that we have the ability to apprehend these children for. We feel that it is a critical component to breaking the cycle that the pimps get these young children into. The pimps are constantly around. The children do not have any break from these pimps. So we feel that this 72 hours is critical. During the 72-hour time frame we will attempt to reunite these children with their parents. We will attempt to give them therapy to get them started on a new road in life, on a new track in life. We fully recognize that we're not going to cure everyone in 72 hours. However, we hope that we can break that cycle. It may take two or three times for these children to be apprehended before we get them back on the straight and narrow.

MR. BRODA: My final question. You indicated pimps. The act isn't criminal legislation, yet johns and pimps can be jailed or fined. Please explain.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, this act enables law enforcement officials to lay charges under the Provincial Court. What this gives

us the ability to do is fine them up to \$25,000, and it also gives us the ability to hold them in jail for up to two years. We feel that this is quite a critical discouragement to these people, these pimps and johns. Frankly, now that the hon. member has raised it, the federal government has the ability to make these sentences longer, to make the fines more. Perhaps that's something they should look at.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

Regional Health Authorities

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Capital health region is a major provider of health care services to the residents of northern Alberta. One-third of acute care beds, 44 percent of intensive care beds, and up to 50 percent of rehabilitation program clients are from outside the Capital health region. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Will the upcoming budget ensure that the regional health authorities such as Capital health receive additional funding for the high number of out-of-region patients they treat?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the question is somewhat in anticipation, I think, of information that is to be provided next week.

I could indicate, first of all, that in the current funding to the Capital health authority there is what is referred to as the import/export calculation, whereby the Capital health authority gets financial credit in their budget. Yes, it's very extensive work that they do for the surrounding regions, particularly those to the north.

Secondly, a feature of our funding which is specifically directed to this overall need is a section referred to as funding for province-wide services. In that regard, I'm sure that if one were to examine the budget of the current year, we would see a very substantial investment of money in that particular area. There will be an increase in that particular line of the health care authorities' budgets for next year too. Yes.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister, then, ensure that the amount that regional health authorities receive to provide services to out-of-region residents matches the actual costs of providing those services in a timely manner?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, there really are two answers that need to be provided. First of all, we do have an overall committee of people that work on costing data in terms of what particular procedures or treatments cost, and those figures are updated annually. The other thing is that, as we all know, there will be a significant increase in the overall health care budget, particularly as it applies to regional health authorities and provincewide services.

Mr. Speaker, there is no way that we can say that, quote, we will have enough money to meet everybody's expectations and demands even in the current budget, but certainly the issues that the member is raising the question on will be substantially addressed in the budget.

MS LEIBOVICI: I look forward to that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to providing the Capital health authority with the adequate resources they need to provide high-cost trauma services to residents of northern Alberta?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated in the Assembly previously, we are currently as a province funding health care in this province at a rate which is I believe the second highest in the country. The province that is ahead of us on a per capita basis is

curiously enough Newfoundland. The budget, as I've said, will include a significant increase for health care. I'm sure that even with the significant increase there will be critics, possibly those across the way, that think there is an endless supply of money for the purpose of health. We are certainly making health a priority as a government. I think that will be shown in the upcoming budget.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last spring the Member for Calgary-Egmont sponsored Bill 204, which proposed changes to the composition of the medical panel used by the WCB to resolve cases where there is a difference in medical opinion. After that bill received second reading in the House, the WCB committed to changing its policy in this area. My question today is for the Minister of Labour. There seems to be some confusion among injured workers and WCB staff as to how the new policy actually works. Can the minister please clarify the situation?

MR. SMITH: It is a good question, Mr. Speaker. The WCB, certainly from debate of Bill 204 last year, recognizes the efforts of both the Member for Calgary-Egmont as the sponsor of that bill and other government MLAs who were concerned to address these issues regarding medical panels.

Last spring, the Workers' Compensation Board, Mr. Speaker, had MLA information sessions on the subject, and the medical panel policy described at those sessions is the policy that is still in place. The new policy emphasizes early communication between the WCB and the injured worker's treating physician. Many situations are resolved this way. This happens early in the claim's process. For example, in 1998 WCB medical advisers initiated 744 phone calls to community doctors, five times as many calls as the previous year.

With respect to the policy for three-person medical panels the policy is to involve three independent physicians, none of whom have had prior involvement with the particular case. The three physicians are all appropriate specialists, Mr. Speaker, one of whom is selected by the injured worker, one of whom is selected by the WCB, and one of whom is selected by the first two physicians. Medical panels consider all the medical background on the case including their perspective of the injured worker's doctor. A medical panel will also consider any particular concerns the injured worker has.

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question again is to the Minister of Labour. Is there something he can do to help ensure that injured workers are aware of the new policy on the medical panels?

MR. SMITH: That's an important follow-up question, Mr. Speaker, because not everybody is tuned in to question period. All the WCB policies including the policy on medical panels are also available on the Workers' Compensation Board's web site, that being www.wcb.ab.ca.

The WCB also provides all injured workers with a handbook, Mr. Speaker, that serves as a road map for handling the claim, and to me it's important to have reasonable expectations of a process going through I think a difficult time, particularly when you're injured and away from the work site. The current handbook describes the availability of medical panels, and I understand that the handbook is being revised, and I know that the WCB would be very amenable to reviewing this part of the book.

2:30

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is also to the same minister. Can he provide assurance that if for any reason medical panels were not set up according to the new policy, the WCB will correct the errors in process?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that is important, because we are as a government responsible for the legislation of the WCB, and although they do work on an arm's-length basis, it is that legislative responsibility that allows us to respond to our constituents and the constituents certainly I know that would be involved in Calgary-Montrose.

I can inform the House that 132 differences in medical opinion were resolved by contacting the injured worker's doctor in 1998. Nine differences, Mr. Speaker, were resolved by medical panels reviewing medical records, and seven more were resolved by medical panels doing physical examinations of injured workers. Fifteen medical panels are currently pending. The process does appear to be working.

Certainly I don't want to presume any error in process from the WCB. I know that we'll take the member's question from this. We will table it with the WCB, and I know that they will respond in their usual fashion. I'm sure that if the member wants to bring this to the attention of the House, he'd be more than pleased to table any responses that would be forthcoming.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Eau Claire Market Loan

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are about Mall Brawl II, the sequel. This one has to do with Calgary. The first question is for the Treasurer. In 1993 Alberta Treasury Branches loaned \$35 million to Eau Claire Market Ltd. and CC Developments to finance the construction of the Eau Claire Market in Calgary. Under the terms of a subsequent agreement concluded on June 11, 1998, Treasury Branches assigned all of its right, title, and interest in the first mortgage to MP Acquisitions Ltd. Now we learn that one of the parties with a financial interest in the Eau Claire Market, Ermineskin Tribal Enterprises, is asserting a claim against the Alberta Treasury Branch and the government of Alberta, amongst others, for \$13.7 million. My first question, as indicated, is for the Treasurer. How much of the \$35 million owing to Alberta taxpayers has been recovered in cash as a result of the transaction between the Alberta Treasury Branch and MP Acquisitions?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I really don't think the member opposite is slow at learning things. I really don't think that. He's proven himself fairly capable on a number of issues. Yet here he is today asking me about a loan in 1993 for \$35 million. Yesterday and other days he was up on his feet saying: how dare you as a government be involved in any way, shape, or form with loans from ATB? Get your hands out of there; get your noses out of there, is what he says. Now he's standing asking me about a loan, \$35 million, to Eau Claire Market.

I don't know about that loan. I don't think I want to know about that loan. If he's got information that he's broadcasting publicly and commercially, then he may want to get into a discussion in terms of the businesspeople down there. But it is not my business, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SAPERS: It was certainly the business of the taxpayers when it was guaranteed in '93. The actual question was about '98, and it was filed in a statement of claim in Calgary Court of Queen's Bench, so it is part of the public domain. [interjections]

My subsequent question to the Treasurer is: when did the Treasurer become aware . . .

Speaker's Ruling Preambles to Supplementary Questions

THE SPEAKER: Gentlemen, please. Hon. members, please.

We know that there's a problem with preambles. We know absolutely in this case that there was a preamble. The chair will accept, however, that the hon. Member from Edmonton-Glenora was using this lengthy introduction to come up with a very quick question.

MR. DAY: So preambles are okay?

THE SPEAKER: No, that's not what I said. I said that the chair will accept the honourable side of all members and assume that it was leading to something. Please. I give that much time.

Eau Claire Market Loan (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When did the Treasurer become aware that the 35 million taxpayer dollars were put at risk as a result of ATB financing in this shopping mall?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, now he's saying that the dollars are at risk. Is that a fact? Is he trying to draw me into something, to saying that I know which loans are good and which loans are bad? He stated that the loan is at risk. Again, I guess he'll have to talk to the customers about that. I'm not convinced of that. He seems to be.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Minister of Justice or perhaps the Acting Minister of Justice or the Acting Premier.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Titles

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Sorry. Please sit down. There's only one Minister of Justice and Attorney General in the province of Alberta. This has been happening here recently, slurs about titles for individuals, and we're moving on.

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

There is no point of order. We will use the appropriate titles in the Assembly with respect to the titles that everybody has. Sit down, please. In the same way that the chair will refer to the Official Opposition House Leader, the same way the chair will refer to the Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition and will not accept any slur on that, the chair will not accept slurs with respect to other titles. There is a place for honour in this Assembly. It's going to remain.

And now it's to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Electric Utility Rates

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Electricity is a significant input cost for many industrial customers in Alberta. If these costs increase, it will make existing industries less competitive and new industries will probably not be attracted to Alberta. The Minister of Energy has said that restructuring electric energy will

enhance the Alberta advantage with competitive electricity prices. My question is to the Minister of Energy. What has happened to industrial electricity rates since industry restructuring started in 1996?

DR. WEST: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the points made in the preamble I have to reject. Companies will come here because we do have competitive rates. In fact, since 1996 the rates in Alberta have dropped about 6 percent on average for TransAlta and Alberta Power customers. I want to also say that TransAlta has an application before the EUB at the present time for one of its largest customers that will bring it the lowest rate in Canada as a power rate. We can't help that British Columbia and some of the other socialist states want to offer deals on power to companies at the expense of residential and other consumers in their province. I have to say that Quebec Hydro and B.C. Hydro have recently done that.

The other point I'd like to make -- if I can have your indulgence, it may cut down another question, and we can get out of this quickly. I'd like to point out what has taken place since the Electric Utilities Act came in in 1996. Some of the industrial customers had contracts with utilities to purchase power through interruptible rates. In return they had received credits that in some cases substantially reduced their power bills. Since Alberta had a large surplus of power at that time, these industrial consumers rarely saw the service interrupted.

In 1996, when the surplus started to shrink, some of the industrial customers, including the pulp and paper companies, chose to move to rates tied to the hourly pool price. This was their choice. This pool price rate enables them to purchase power at lower prices when the pool price is low and to reduce their demand when the pool price is high.

Pool prices can be as low as a half cent a kilowatt in off-peak hours. Typically, during peak hours it is now over 3 cents a kilowatt. Pool prices fluctuate with supply and demand. Now that supply and demand is more in balance -- we don't have those huge surpluses -- the price of power purchased under the interruptible rates has increased. However, industrial consumers have the opportunity to reduce their demand in times of high pool prices and limit price increases. So they have a choice. Recent developments in the power pool have provided additional opportunities for the customers with flexible requirements to lower their costs by offering to interrupt during times of pool shortages.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Hon. member, that was nearly four minutes, and the clock has gone. The chair will assume that all the questions have been asked and all the questions have been answered with respect to that last exchange.

2:40

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Today seven hon. members have advised that they wish to participate in Recognitions, and we will begin in 30 seconds with the hon. Member for Highwood.

Hon. members, we'll proceed in the following order. First of all, the hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, and then the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Provincial High School Wrestling Championships

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to give recognition to the splendid efforts of Mr. Bill Young, the staff,

students, and parents of Highwood high school in High River who hosted wrestling teams from high schools across Alberta this past weekend. Over 300 female and male wrestlers participated in the Alberta school athletic association's provincial high school wrestling championships. Team awards went to High Level high school of High Level, Christ the King school of Leduc, Salisbury composite high school of Sherwood Park, Sir Winston Churchill high school of Calgary, Lord Beaverbrook high school of Calgary, Will Sinclair high school of Rocky Mountain House, and of course to Highwood high school in High River.

This event was sponsored by Cargill foods, McDonald's, Mullen Trucking, Rainbow Esso, and the Royal Canadian Legion. Thanks go out to all those who helped make this a very successful event and congratulations particularly to the wrestlers and their coaches. Well done.

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

1999 Labatt Brier

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the volunteers and organizers of the 1999 Labatt Brier, Canada's men's curling championship, to be held in Edmonton March 6 to March 14. Events like this would not be successful without the dedication and many hours of hard work put in by hundreds of organizers and volunteers. From the organizers who secured the 1999 Labatt Brier for Edmonton to the volunteers who will help out during the event, everyone's contribution is important.

Curling began in 16th century Scotland, but it has become Canada's game. It is a sport enjoyed by people of all ages and can be purely recreational or played at the extremely high level we will all be treated to in the coming weeks. I think a curling rink has been at the heart of every Alberta community I've ever been in, and in this way curling has formed an important part of Alberta's history and makes it even more special for Edmonton and Alberta to be the hosts of the '99 Labatt Brier. I congratulate all the volunteers for their hard work. It's about to pay off. I wish both spectators and participants an enjoyable and successful event. Once again Edmonton and Alberta have lived up to their names as excellent hosts for world-class events and as centres of volunteer spirit unparalleled in Canada.

Thank you.

Winter World Games for the Deaf

MR. DOERKSEN: From March 3 to 15 hearing-impaired athletes from around the world will compete in the Winter World Games for the Deaf in Davos, Switzerland. I'm delighted to inform the Assembly that Alberta will be sending three talented athletes to the games. Hockey players David Fraser from Sherwood Park and Garrett Savard and Scott Savard from Red Deer will lend their skill and expertise to Canada's hockey team. Joining the athletes in Switzerland are Edmontonian Jo-Anne Robinson, the chef de mission, and six team assistants from Edmonton, Esther, and Calgary. Of course, Mr. Speaker, everybody knows where Red Deer is, but do they know that Esther is just 10 minutes east of New Brigiden?

I would like to extend my congratulations to the Alberta Deaf Sports Association for supporting sports competition within the deaf community and offering athletic competition at the provincial level. The association has done an excellent job preparing for the games. I know all members of the Assembly join me in wishing Team Canada well at the Winter World Games for the Deaf.

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

Blayne Iskiw

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to recognize a young constituent of mine, Blayne Iskiw. Blayne will be representing Nova Scotia at the Brier, which starts on March 6 here in Edmonton. As a resident of Edmonton-Ellerslie, he began his curling career while attending Percy Page high school. While at the University of Alberta his team won a bronze medal at the world junior championships. He now attends Dalhousie University and plays third on the Nova Scotia team.

Blayne has at 21 years of age already established a wonderful record of accomplishments in the curling world. We congratulate him, his proud family and friends, all of whom have supported him and will be there cheering him on next week. Good luck, Blayne, and welcome back to Edmonton.

Father Jozsef Hamor

MR. YANKOWSKY: Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour for me to rise and pay tribute to a great Albertan and Edmontonian who passed away on February 13, 1999. Father Hamor was laid to rest on Saturday, February 20, with hundreds of his parishioners and friends in attendance at St. Emeric Hungarian Catholic Church to say farewell. Born in Hungary in 1914, Father Hamor studied theology with both graduation and ordination to the priesthood in 1940. From 1940 to 1950 Father Hamor was an academic dean and superior of a major seminary in Hungary.

With the 1950 Communist takeover of Hungary, this Salesian of Don Bosco priest became an outcast in his homeland, hiding constantly from the secret police. Father Hamor fled Hungary during the October 1956 uprising, never to return. In his flight to freedom he saved the lives of 12 seminarians. Upon his arrival in Edmonton in 1957 this scholar, musician, playwright, liturgist, and teacher was given the pastoral care of the Hungarian Catholic community, a task he did well to his dying moment.

May God grant you rest from your labour and may your memory live on forever.

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

Beth Israel Torah Presentation

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize the Beth Israel sisterhood who presented a new Sefer Torah to their congregation in Edmonton this past weekend. The Torah is the holiest gift and the most precious gift of Almighty God to the people of Israel. It is also the most important living document in Judaism and contains the Mitzvos, or commandments, as well as other teachings and stories and includes all five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Mr. Speaker, this is the first new Torah for the Beth Israel Synagogue in over 30 years, and I was honoured to personally witness its presentation and dedication along with my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark and other elected officials. Special recognition and congratulations are hereby extended to Ruth Pakes, Miriam Rabinovitch, Shoshana Pollack, and all other members of the sisterhood, as well as to Alvin Winestock, Harry Silverman, Clyde Hurtig, Rabbi Lagnado, Reb Yaakov Cohen, Brian Kastner, Mrs. Dolgoy, Edith Kay, Mike Mann, the Laskin family, and numerous others who participated in this historic occasion.

Thank you.

International Women's Day

MS BARRETT: On March 8, 1908, women workers in New York

City took to the streets to protest poor working conditions and low wages. This Saturday, March 6, I will be joining women who will be gathering at Edmonton city hall to celebrate International Women's Day and honour our foremothers.

I rise to recognize the importance of women in Alberta who, 89 years after the first march, take to the streets for some of the same reasons that their foremothers did. These are women who in 1999 are still making only 66 percent of what men make. These are women who have a high risk of poverty, particularly single-parent women, older women, aboriginal women, immigrant women, visible minority women, and women with disabilities. They have been bearing the brunt of harsh cuts to health, education, and social funding.

The United Nations states that two-thirds of the world's unpaid and paid work is performed by women, obviously women carrying the burden of unpaid caregiving work in the home and voluntary sector to fill the gaps left by shrunken public services. As the unequal situation of women is rarely mentioned and rarely acknowledged, these women deserve recognition not only today, on IW Day, but also every day.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Titles

THE SPEAKER: We've been advised of one point of order today, but before we move to the one point of order, the chair would like to make a comment with respect to an exchange that occurred between himself and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora during the question period, at which point in time the chair intervened in terms of an exchange of questions and basically indicated that he was not going to permit a slur with respect to certain titles being held by individual members of Executive Council.

2:50

The chair heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora say: a question to the Acting Minister of Justice. The chair looked over to the government benches and thought he saw the presence of the real Minister of Justice and in fact believed that he saw the presence and the physical being of the real Minister of Justice so quickly assumed in his head that in fact there was an inappropriate comment made in that regard. The current configuration of the members on the front bench has the Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs sitting in a chair. Then there's a chair right beside him, and sometimes when the individual who sits beside him leans back, he disappears from the presence of the chair. In this case the chair thought he saw the presence of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General and, quicker than he should have, responded and reacted and intervened.

So the chair would like to convey a humble apology to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Certainly if there was any intent or any feeling in the mind of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora that the chair was accusing him of a slur, the chair wants to make it very, very clear to the hon. member that this was not the intent and that he's sorry it happened.

At this point we'll move on to the purported point of order by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Provocative Language

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm referring to an exchange that occurred between the Premier and the leader of the third party. My authority is *Beauchesne* 408(2), specifically the enjoinder that "answers to questions . . . should not provoke debate."

I can't imagine a better, clearer way of provoking debate than for the Premier to stand in the House and rattle off a litany of I counted at least six questions, all of which I'd be happy to engage him in debate on but not during valuable and precious question period time. It seems to me that clearly he said those things with an intention to provoke debate. The reality is that our caucus position on those issues is clear and simple: we support section 15 of the Charter. We've said that the Domestic Relations Act is inadequate, that Bill 12 is inadequate, that we'll be introducing major amendments to Bill 12.

I'd just finally conclude by saying this. The Premier's invitation to offer advice would be seen as far more genuine if he sought and listened to that advice long before the bill was introduced in the Assembly.

Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the comments of the Opposition House Leader at the end of his submission prove the point that his submission is merely an attempt again to make a point under points of order which should more properly be made elsewhere.

The Premier obviously posed some rhetorical questions and had no intention of members opposite getting up at that very moment and answering the questions. In response to a properly posed question to him from the leader of the third party, in a proper answer to that question he said: these are questions for all Albertans; these are questions for you to answer and put your position on the record. But obviously he had no intention of provoking them to get up at that point and answer the questions.

The point of order is therefore out of order.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. members. Certainly it is very, very true that the purpose of question period is for Her Majesty's Official Opposition and those members associated to ask questions of the government and to seek information through questions to the government. It is not a part of the question period routine to have ministers of Executive Council ask questions of the members in the House. So one would have to be a bit subjective in terms of then going forward to the environment in which the questions were stated and the answers were responded.

Certainly it is totally inappropriate to provoke debate in either a question or an answer in the question period. But it's also true, under *Erskine May*, that certain latitude is given to ministers of the Crown in responding to questions. The chair listened very attentively and basically could see a response to a question, and there was, in the chair's mind, almost a searching for an answer to see what the particular position is and: if you have a position, give it to me and provide it to me. The chair also heard very, very specifically on at least two occasions where the responder to the questions in this case basically said, "I would like to know what your position is," inviting a response. That certainly is an appropriate response in a certain question.

So that particular exchange has the elements of everything, but you have to take it all together in terms of the whole ebb and flow to really come to the question of whether or not there was a point of order. The chair finds it hard to see where it is a legitimate point of order.

On that point of view, we're going to move on to Orders of the Day.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 20, 21, 22, 23, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 38.

[Motion carried]

Long-term Care

Q20. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

How many long-term care facilities are currently being renovated to add new beds, and what is the total number of long-term care beds being added to the health care system?

THE SPEAKER: It's appropriate at this point in time to find out from someone on the government side what the disposition would be on that.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health we're pleased to accept that question.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to close the debate.

MS LEIBOVICI: There are some members who'd like to speak to it, if they can, even though it's been accepted.

THE SPEAKER: Well, it's certainly appropriate. We've got one response, part of the debate. These are all debatable motions.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I hope this isn't too out of order, but I was prepared to speak either way to this. I would like to say that I'm delighted that the minister is willing to supply the answer to this question. I learn more and more about the portfolio of seniors' issues every day, and certainly long-term care facilities at this point, I think, would have to be one of the primary concerns. So how many long-term care facilities are being renovated to add new beds and what the total number is of long-term beds being added is of great concern to the people in Edmonton-Centre, and I am very pleased that the government is going to answer this. I look forward to the actual numbers coming forward.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to that.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is indeed an important subject area, and as a result we did have some individuals who did wish to address the whole issue of long-term care facilities.

The reality is, as we know, that there is a long-term care review that is ongoing in this province and has been ongoing, unfortunately, for at least three years. We also know that there is an interim report that is at this point still being kept under wraps by the Department of Health that would perhaps shed some light as to the direction that the province is taking with regards to long-term care.

Now, one of the reasons that the issue of long-term care has come to the forefront is what we are seeing in our constituencies on almost a daily basis. Whether it is because of the lack of access to health care facilities, there are long-term care patients who are occupying acute care beds. Therefore there are blockages that are occurring in the system. When we hear about the lack of beds within the acute care system, one needs to look at the total picture, which includes

long-term care as well. So the information that the minister will be providing in terms of those beds that are being renovated as well as the total number that are being added to the system will be very interesting to see.

It'll also be interesting to see given that the long-term care review committee has not yet finished their report. So I'm wondering whether or not there's some prejudgement of what is needed within the system at this point in time.

3:00

I'll be curious to also see within the answer to the question whether some of the projected closures, such as the closures in Vilna, to the long-term care centre there, are incorporated in the minister's answer and whether there has been taken into account the shuffling that occurs from one location within this province to another. In my own constituency this morning I had a phone call about an individual who's suffering from dementia. He's been released from the hospital on five occasions within a short period of time. His landlord has indicated that if he is found wandering, they will call the police services in. The reality is there is no bed for this individual. As I said, there is probably in each one of our constituencies examples that we can think of right at an instant's notice with regards to the impact that the lack of long-term care facilities are having in this province.

We know that there is an increase that's projected in the rate of seniors. We know that the baby boomer bulge will impact largely in terms of the services that are required, and we also know that to wait until November of 1999 for a report that in fact could well be written at this point in time is too late. If we wait until November of 1999 for the report from the committee, the reality is that if there were any buildings or additional dollars that are going to be put into the system to address this particular area, they probably would not be in effect until the year 2001. So we've lost two years when we could have had some proactive action with regards to long-term care.

If I may just close by saying that I do have a concern with that. Hopefully when we look at the answer to this particular question, some of those concerns may be addressed, but it's my understanding that the chair of the long-term care committee had indicated in a news article that I saw that perhaps long-term care was not an issue. I think it is one of the biggest issues in this province, and it is an issue that needs to be addressed as quickly as possible.

So I'm looking forward to the response to this particular question. I'm looking forward to seeing in the budget . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, we have a point of order here.

Point of Order Debate on Written Questions

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, we've been in session now for just about two weeks, and this is the first time I've raised a point of order. I've tried not to raise points of order unless they're absolutely essential.

We're talking now about written questions and motions for returns. The government accepted the written question. The debate, if there is any debate, is whether the question should be accepted or not accepted, not with respect to the content of the issue. The member is not speaking to whether the question should be accepted or not accepted. In fact, there's no debate on whether it should be accepted or not accepted. It has been accepted.

So it's totally out of order, Mr. Speaker, I would submit, for the hon. member to be speaking at length on the subject matter of the question when the purpose of written questions is to request information from the government that's too long to be dealt with in

question period and inappropriate to be dealt with in question period. Therefore, I'd ask you to ask the members that if they're going to debate motions which need no debate, they should at least stick to the purpose of the debate, which is whether the question is an appropriate question to be asked and should be accepted by the government.

THE SPEAKER: On the point of order.

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was hoping in my remarks that I was addressing the issue of how important this particular question is and that I appreciated the government responding to the question that we put forward. But I did want to outline in terms of the importance of this particular question and why we had asked the question that we did. It's my understanding that these motions are debatable and that therefore my remarks would be acceptable within that context.

THE SPEAKER: There's absolutely no doubt, hon. members, that all of these written questions and all of these motions for returns are debatable. What the chair never knows is what the background is in coming to the final point that's being given in the response, and this is a daily searching in terms of the chair in listening to the questions that are offered by hon. members in this Assembly and as much to the answers that are offered in this Assembly. Oftentimes there's a dialogue that goes along for what seems to be a painful amount of time before one comes to the actual conclusion -- and it's not at all uncommon -- "And now I'm going to answer this specific question," after something is given.

So brevity is always the best. Brevity is always the best at any time in a Legislative Assembly. Of course actually I think the skill of the true parliamentarian is to deliver the maximum message in the shortest possible amount of time.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, you still have the floor.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In actual fact I was wrapping up my remarks on this particular question and indicating that this is a key concern in the province. Whenever I have had meetings in the last while with either seniors, health care administrators, or individuals who are caregivers within the health care system, it invariably comes around to this issue of long-term care beds. I know that in regards to the particular question there are many individuals across this province who will be looking with interest at the answers to the question of which facilities are being renovated and which ones are being added to the health care system.

So I provide my thanks to the minister for giving these responses. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Regional Health Authority Accounting

Q21. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

How many regional health authorities have examinations/audits under way, how many have been completed, and what is the total cost to taxpayers?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, at the risk of incurring yet another diatribe on the reasons behind it, we accept the question.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate my colleague for Edmonton-Meadowlark for presenting this question. The question must be accepted. Of the regional health authorities across this province -- there are 17 -- I understand 15 of them are in a deficit situation. The examinations or the audits that are under way will be very beneficial to the administrators of health care in this province in dealing with this. We all know what has occurred in the last couple of weeks in Lakeland. I'm very interested, at least, to see if these examinations or audits had anything to do with the discharging of the nonelected board in Lakeland.

Then we look to the west side of the province, and we have the regional health authority of WestView. There are also rumblings that they may be discharged from service. This written question will be instrumental in getting to the bottom of the enormous deficits that have been run up in the regional health authorities.

Now, we look at Calgary and we look at Edmonton. Edmonton, as far as I know, has very little deficit. It's doing marvelous work, heroic work. In Calgary, on the other hand, there is a \$25 million deficit, I believe. If the hon. member's question will help resolve this, as to why one urban health authority has such a large deficit and one is managing to get by, this will be very beneficial not only to members of the House but to all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to enter the debate on this Written Question 21. The question reads:

How many regional health authorities have examinations/audits under way, how many have been completed, and what is the total cost to taxpayers?

It's a very legitimate question. It's a question that I'm sure members are interested in hearing. It is inappropriate that this question would be asked in question period because a minister wouldn't reasonably be expected to have those kinds of facts and figures available to him at his disposal. So it's very properly posed as a written question. I'm pleased that the government has indicated that they wish to accept this question.

I just want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that there are a number of members on my side of the House who wish to proceed with some important private members' business this afternoon, and they're encouraging me to vote against this motion because they feel that their ability to carry out private members' business is being impeded by apparent time-wasting manoeuvres on the other side. All I can say is I personally think that this is a very legitimate, proper question. I think that we should support it. But I don't have a lot of control over how other members may choose to vote.

3:10

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And if I've ever heard a threat to muscle an opposition member, then that's exactly what I've just heard right now. Perhaps it was in a velvet glove, but the reality is that threat is there. This is not a delaying tactic. These questions have come not only from the Official Opposition but from citizens from across this province, and if you decide to deny, then you are denying the citizens their ability . . .

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on a point of order?

Point of Order

Allegations against Members

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Under 23(h), "makes allegations against another member." The hon. member referred to the Member for Medicine Hat as making a threat. That's an allegation, an insinuation that's entirely inappropriate in the circumstance. I, as other members of the House, listened carefully to what the member said. What the member said quite clearly was that this question had been accepted, that it was a proper question to be accepted. The government had accepted it because the information should be provided, and as a judge once said to me in a court of law when I was there: Mr. Hancock, when you're winning, sit down and shut up. That's essentially the message that was being delivered by the Member for Medicine Hat. There was no threat implied.

THE SPEAKER: On this point of order.

MS LEIBOVICI: If there's no threat implied -- and I would like to hear that actually from the Member for Medicine Hat -- then I accept that. But until I hear that, it sounded very much to me -- and in reading the *Hansard* I think anyone can make that inference as well.

THE SPEAKER: Let's make this very, very clear. In order for a threat to be there, an hon. member must say: well, I threaten you. No such thing occurred. The chair listened very attentively to what was happening. There was no such utterance that came out of the mouth of the hon. Member for Medicine Hat. It's also true that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark didn't say that somebody was threatening her as an hon. member. She said something along the lines: well, if it sounds like a threat, it must be. It's something like: if you're waddling like a duck, then you must be a duck. We all know that isn't true, but that's the statement that goes hand in hand with that.

So let us move on, please. Whose turn is it? Is it the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's turn?

MS LEIBOVICI: It is, Mr. Speaker, and I'm valiantly trying to expedite the process, but we've probably spent about 10 minutes now on points of order.

Debate Continued

MS LEIBOVICI: The reality is that I do appreciate the government providing this information. This is information that, as I indicated, has been asked of me in the role of health care critic by a number of individuals across the province to find out exactly what is occurring with the regional health authorities. We know that the Lakeland region has had more than one audit. We know that there are audits occurring in Calgary. We know that there's been a recent audit in WestView. There's that question out there in terms of: what is the situation with regards to regional health authorities and their capabilities in terms of organizing within themselves to manage, and what is the total cost to the taxpayers of all the audits that have been done or are under way? This is a very reasonable request, and obviously the government feels that as well because they have acceded to providing the information.

I look forward to the information that the government is providing. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

You're Amazing Program

Q22. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

How much money has been raised from corporate sponsors to support the You're Amazing health promotion project, and how much has the Department of Health invested in this project between January 1, 1997, and February 17, 1999?

MR. HANCOCK: With a great deal of reluctance I accept on behalf of the government.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is also an important question. Again I appreciate the minister providing the information, because what we heard at the health care summit was that in fact prevention is one of the keys to our health care system in promoting good health within this province.

When we look at the answers to these questions, it will be interesting to note the dollars that have been provided by the Department of Health as well as by any corporate sponsors to the You're Amazing health promotion project. Though it wasn't in this particular question, perhaps the answers will be there in terms of the cost benefit of this particular program, what the outcomes are of the dollars that have been spent, how many of these documents, the calendars, were actually distributed and to which groups they were targeted.

I'm looking forward to the information that's provided. It may raise some other questions as well, depending on what the information is that's coming forward from the minister.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Physician Payment Alternatives

Q23. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

What projects are under way which promote alternative approaches to paying physicians through the tripartite process involving Alberta Health, the Alberta Medical Association, and regional health authorities?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, we accept on behalf of the government.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This, again, is another important question, especially in light of some of the comments that we heard around the health summit, that I think will provide very illuminating information.

We know that throughout this province the doctors are frustrated, that they're upset, that a lot of them are spending time not providing direct medical service but trying to access beds for their patients, trying to speed up, if possible, certain visits to specialists, access to radiology. So there's a whole number of issues with regard to physicians and payment to physicians.

One of the messages from the summit again -- and it was Dr. Noseworthy who actually indicated it -- was that there is a need to perhaps look at alternate forms of paying physicians and that this would be very important in breaking down some of the silos that we

see in health care. As a result, it will be interesting to see what the projects are that are under way that promote these alternative approaches to paying physicians.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Forest Officer Staffing Levels

Q30. Mr. White moved that the following question be accepted. How many qualified forest officers were employed by Alberta Environmental Protection on April 1 of each year from 1992 to 1998?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We find it necessary to amend this motion. The word "qualified" is a difficult one, in fact, depending on education, employment qualifications, and then, of course, requirements under the forestry act. We think we know what the hon. member is trying to get at, so I'm going to be moving an amendment.

We want to strike out "qualified" and add "with the working title or classification of forest officer, forester, agrologist, and manager in land and forest service" after "forest officers." The question will now read:

How many forest officers with the working title or classification of forest officer, forester, agrologist, and manager in land and forest service were employed by Alberta Environmental Protection on April 1 of each year from 1992 to 1998?

We would accept that as amended.

3:20

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

MR. WHITE: Speaking to the amendment, sir, yes. The qualification put forward by the minister sounds to be acceptable, assuming that his answer, when it comes back, will deal with full-time equivalent positions in all of those categories that are so outlined in his amendment. If that's the understanding that this side and that side have, then the amendment is quite in order and is very acceptable.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, I would have liked to have had an answer to the qualification, but that not being forthcoming, I'll assume that which was asked for will be delivered, and in that case I close debate and ask all hon. members to agree with the motion.

[Motion as amended carried]

Crown Land Timber Damage Assessments

Q31. Mr. White moved that the following question be accepted. How much money has the government collected each year between 1995 and 1998 for timber damage assessments on Crown land outside forest management agreement areas that is harvested by non forest operators such as energy and utility companies, and how have those funds been utilized to offset the land-based impact on the annual allowable cut?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're very reluctant, but we find it necessary to reject this particular question. The problem we have with this one is that the damages are not paid to government whenever it's inside an FMA, and if it's in a quota, the damages could go to the quota holder. What the government gets is the normal stumpage of that material. The difficulty we've got with tracking it, of course, is that the stumpage goes into general revenue. As far as tracking to see if it comes back for damages, we don't have that ability. So we find that we would have to reject this particular question.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a shame that the minister can't answer a quite straightforward question put forward by this side of the House on behalf of a number of people in the industry who would kind of like to know where these moneys go. You'll recognize that in this province -- and the minister has stated this many a time -- the Crown lands are used for many purposes. One of them is certainly to harvest the forests growing there. Others are for transportation and seismic lines and the like, searching for valuable resources in the subsurface. In doing so, oil and gas companies, and rightly so, pay for the timber rights that come off these sites, whether it be drilling sites or pipeline sites or for any purpose, roadways and the like. Yes, it's true. They pay to the FMA holder those funds. We wouldn't ask that. As a matter of fact, if you look at the question and read the question carefully, it says, "Crown land outside forest management agreement areas." It refers specifically to those Crown lands that are outside those.

There are a number of lands that are actually outside quota-designed areas too. In fact, that's what we're looking for, those lands that were outside that that are harvested by non forest operators, the utility companies and the energy companies. In fact, the money is paid to the government. Yes, it does go into general revenue, but in fact it is accounted for. There is a sum there. Surely the minister could have found the time to find that sum and report that sum to the Legislature. [interjection] Yes, perhaps it isn't specifically earmarked, and maybe it shouldn't be. That's a point of policy by the government. Maybe those moneys that are derived aren't earmarked specifically for a purpose, but they should be at least registered against that so that all and sundry know that the funds that are derived from the fibre that is lost are actually accounted for and know where it goes.

It's a shame that this member doesn't receive the answers to those questions, but we'll have to accept our fate for having the right to ask questions and the government having the right to not answer them.

[Motion lost]

U.S. Lumber Countervail Agreement

Q32. Mr. White moved that the following question be accepted. Of the money collected under the U.S. lumber countervail agreement since 1995, how much has the federal government returned to the province each year, how was the money utilized by the province, and how much was used specifically for the development of forest product markets outside the United States?

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, we finally got one that's well written and one that we can track without putting in place a whole host of accounting mechanisms that the hon. member thinks we should do to track the stumpage fee that's paid to the Crown, that just because it came off a seismic plan or off a well site, we should have some special accounting for it. Well, we're not going to get into that business, but the fact is that this one is easily identified, and we can accept this question.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I shall close the debate. It is good that we found a question that we can agree upon and a question that can be asked and answered in the form it was given. This is a rather important number to many of the forest product businesses in this province. To file it annually would probably be the right thing to do, in the annual report. That would be a generous undertaking to this side of the House. More than a generous undertaking, it would be a reasonable and proper undertaking for the minister in future filings of his annual report.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried]

Natural Resource Revenues on Leased Land

Q33. Dr. Nicol moved that the following question be accepted. How many current agricultural leaseholders have pledged the natural resource royalties or revenues on their leased land as security under an agreement with a bank or financial institution, and how many of these collateral agreements terminate each year between 1999 and 2020?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a little bit of difficulty with this one and once again find it necessary to move some amendments in order that we can answer what we think the hon. member is asking. The problem we have is that no leaseholder is entitled to any natural resource royalty. So of course the answer there would be none if we were going to take it as it's written.

As well, the government doesn't require that compensation be paid to leaseholders for consent to allow access to the minerals. So that arrangement between a leaseholder and a resource company we don't have a record of. We don't know what those numbers are.

We need to make a couple of amendments. Those are: by striking out "the natural resource royalties or revenues on" and by striking out "collateral" and substituting "lease." The question would now read:

How many current agricultural leaseholders have pledged their leased land as security under an agreement with a bank or financial institution, and how many of these lease agreements terminate each year between 1999 and 2020?

So I would move it with those amendments.

3:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East on the amendment.

DR. NICOL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Looking at the amendment, what I would suggest is that it significantly changes the scope of information that is being requested, and the question as amended would be basically providing some information which is already available. So if the minister has already said that he cannot

provide us with the information that would show the leaseholders who have committed their revenues from that lease in terms of their natural resource agreements to a financial institution for payment, if that cannot be provided, just to save his staff time, I would suggest we reject the entire motion.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to close the debate.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just mentioned before that with the amendments in there it's basically going to provide us with information which is already in the public domain, so I would suggest not having their staff go through the trouble of providing me something I already have. I hope we would reject the entire motion.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Well, the question will now be phrased slightly differently. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has moved rejection of Written Question 33. Would all those in favour, please say aye?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. WHITE: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: A point of order.

Point of Order Voting on Motions

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, when a motion is on the floor by a member, it behooves the chair to deal with the motion. As much as it is expedient to change the motion . . .

THE SPEAKER: That's exactly what the chair is doing. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East moved rejection of the motion.

MR. WHITE: No, he didn't.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, he did, hon. member. That's the question. Sorry.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has moved rejection of the question. The chair heard it. Is that correct?

DR. NICOL: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I started by saying . . .

THE SPEAKER: That's all we need to know now. That's all we need to know. That deals with the point of order from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder.

Now, the hon. Member for Medicine Hat, your point of order.

MR. RENNER: My point simply was that there was a motion on the floor that originally was made by the member to accept. That was amended, so really we should be voting on the amended motion. The member is suggesting we vote against his motion. I just want to make sure that when we do vote, we clearly understand what it is that we're voting for, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: And that's why the chair paused for a second. If I understand this, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East has now come forward saying: defeat my request. If I'm looking at everybody's heads, they're all saying: we all want to defeat it. Okay. The

chair made it very simple by changing the original motion to basically say: would all those members in favour of the motion put forward by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to reject Written Question 33 say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: All those opposed, say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried. That means it's rejected.

Needle Exchange Program Funding

Q38. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

How much money was provided to needle exchange programs in Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie to prevent HIV infection among nonprescription drug users for the fiscal year 1997-98 and from April 1, 1998, to February 17, 1999?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and the government we accept the question.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would again like to thank the Minister of Health for providing that information. It's a coincidence that this morning when I was listening to CBC, they had an interview with regards to the importance of these particular programs. I thought it'd be interesting to provide that information to the Legislative Assembly, that it costs for one person who's infected by HIV \$150,000 on average in terms of care and that if we can prevent an individual from being infected, that's the cost savings to the system. So the importance of these particular programs cannot be underestimated, and I appreciate the information and look forward to it.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that motions for returns on the Order Paper stay in their places with the exception of motions for returns 56 and 57.

[Motion carried]

Electricity Purchase Arrangements

M56. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the Ministry of Energy or sent to the Ministry of Energy for the period December 1, 1998, to February 18, 1999, evaluating the potential aggregate surplus or deficit in the balancing pool, BP, from the auctioning of power purchase arrangements, PPAs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Energy I find it necessary to reject this motion. The reason is because there are no studies or reports that evaluate the "potential aggregate surplus or deficit in the balancing pool . . . from the auctioning of power purchase [agreements]." The reason there are no studies or reports is that the design and auction of the power purchase agreements are currently being developed by an independent assessment team, and until this independent assessment team determines the final design of the power purchase agreements, it'd be virtually impossible to try to estimate the value of the power purchase agreements.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that here is the centre, the kernel of supposed truth that is to make this entire, supposedly, deregulation but reregulation of an entire industry, which, I might add, as the minister earlier today implied, was one of the most efficient in existence -- and we have the lowest rates. In fact we have and always have had since the turn of this current century at least three, many more than that, independent producers. They did not, to the best of the knowledge of the government of the day, all from that time through regulation collude to increase prices or unduly restrict competition from a -- I hate to use the term -- right-wing position. That's exactly what you want. It's my position too, Mr. Minister, so we're even on that one.

But what is strange -- and this is the kernel of truth. This is what the entire hope of the three pieces of legislation in this Legislature have been put forward to do, to make the industry more competitive in the way of production, not the distribution and not the transmission. Yet here's the question that goes to the heart of it in saying: "Lookit; where's the value of the PPAs? How do they relate to the value received by an individual consumer? What happens when there's a surplus? What happens when there's an aggregate deficit?" This is the crux of it all.

So what the government is saying is that they have no answer for this simple question. It takes a reasonable amount of time to explain this, part of which was hinted at today, although the platitudes that were done in question period didn't answer the fundamental question. This is fundamental to it, and there is no answer. That means in effect that this entire deregulation and reregulation that has occurred to this point has been done on a wing and a prayer and not one cost-benefit analysis filed. It's unbelievable that this could occur in a province that supposedly prides itself on good management.

It's interesting. There's a relatively recent article published in *Canadian Business*, a noted publication which I'm sure a number of businessmen and a number of the members of the Legislature do read regularly. The final conclusion, citing much and much evidence, is that this government has made a major boo-boo. There doesn't seem to be any evidence whatsoever that this government has headed down a reasonable path.

It's an experiment in Canada, and probably there would be many more places that should have started to -- I can't use the term "privatize" -- more commercialize, shall we say, the generation of electrical energy. This province hasn't been in good shape for quite some time. This is not the case in Ontario or Manitoba or British Columbia or Saskatchewan. Ontario has a major problem trying to undo what's done, but this place didn't need this experience. It was

some knee-jerk reaction of somebody who decided and said, "This is the absolute way we have to go," on a wing and a prayer and a philosophical statement that was believed so strongly that it was an absolute truism and it did not need any proof. This motion simply asks for some proof. That's it. Just find somebody that says: yes, it's a good deal.

3:40

I can point out to you in the library that there are two or three studies, one from the United Kingdom, that started about 10 years ago down this path. They are just now getting a handle on it. In fact, there's many a commentator that will say that they got to this point after much heartache, a great deal of consternation on behalf of consumers and generators alike, and in fact there is not a shred of evidence that it has lowered the rate at which the consumer in the United Kingdom pays. Not one shred of evidence to that. There's not one shred of evidence that it even has made the business any more efficient.

Here is a simple, straightforward question, and it's unfortunate that this minister can't even answer the simple one. It really is a very sad state of the business of managing the Alberta economy when there's the one area that was really doing reasonably well and the government had to go muck it up.

Now we have a case where we have 7,600 gigajoules of energy being produced, the maximum capacity. We use pretty near 7,000 at peak. We have a very small cushion. What do we have? We have the minister standing in the House today decrying the fact that these socialist entities cost much, much more. Well, it's odd to believe that those are the very, very same utilities that this government turned to when there was a shortage of power and said: yes, we'll buy it from B.C.; yes, we'll buy it from Saskatchewan. It is absolutely ridiculous that a simple question cannot be answered. Those members on that side should be ashamed of not keeping up with what the Minister of Energy is doing to this part of the industry.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

Electricity Deregulation

M57. Mr. White moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies and reports prepared by or for the Ministry of Energy or sent to the Ministry of Energy for the period January 1, 1998, to February 18, 1999, evaluating the impact of electricity deregulation on the utility bills of various classes of Alberta consumers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought on the last one we were talking about megawatts and not gigajoules, but we'll take another try at this one. Unfortunately the minister finds it necessary that this one be rejected on two counts.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

First, there are no studies or reports "evaluating the impact of electrical deregulation on the utility bills of various classes of Alberta [customers]," and secondly, when you think about it, an evaluation of the impact of deregulation on customer bills can only be done after the fact, and it has just come to pass. So it's too early to determine or do any studies to really clarify the impact.

MR. WHITE: This is really classic. Here we are again. Here we are

on this whole deregulation process, and we ask the simple question: what is all this deregulation going to do or what are the government's expectations going to do to the rates which the average consumer pays? What do we get? On one count we get no answer whatever. The minister just said: the information doesn't exist; we'd never bother to check.

As I recall, in many a speech in this Legislature that is precisely what the Minister of Energy was saying. He was saying: we can't guarantee it, but this is what it should do; with more competition in the business, this is exactly what's going to occur; we know that for a fact. Not one study, not anybody that may have an experience either in England or Pennsylvania or California to say: "Well, it has or it hasn't in that case," or "We expect it to," or "This is what the expected growth is to be in the industry, and therefore there is some rational reason for the price to go up substantially, but if we deregulate here or reregulate," as the case may be, "the price may be held in check." No, they don't say that. They say: oh, no, we don't know.

Well, the fact is I have a letter. We in fact do a little due diligence now and again, and I have a freedom of information request in my hand here. It's dated December 21. In fact, the department comes back and says: well, we can't give you that information because of the third party. What happens in an application for those of you that don't make these applications for information -- presumably you have access to it. You make an application and pay good money to do it. What happens is the department comes back with the answer to your question and says, "Well, we can provide the information; this is how much it's going to cost," or "We have to check with third parties because the information that you asked for in effect affects their commercial position." What happens is that when the third parties object, because they're asked, then the officer in charge must make a judgment as to whether the information should be divulged or not. In this case, the information was withheld.

Now, here we have a minister saying that there are two reasons we can't provide the information. One, there is no information, and two, there are no documents. Well, one, if there's no information, how in heck did you make any decisions whatsoever about turning the business of the electrical generation of energy in this province totally on its ear?

We realize there are virtually none. Since '94 there hasn't been one major construction of a power plant, of a base load power plant, in this province.

MR. SMITH: That's old thinking, Lance. That's old thinking.

MR. WHITE: I hear a cry from the other side. "That's old thinking." Old thinking to produce new power plants to produce power? I mean, the margin has come down so narrow that we can't produce it. [interjection] The minister must be saying: yes, there have been some cogeneration plants. Ah, yes, and that has actually added to the security of the province, and thank goodness for that. But do you really realize why there's cogeneration? Cogeneration is where a business like Dow Chemical or Joffre or one of those big ones needs energy on a continuous basis. They cannot put up with a system that is interrupted. Dow Chemical told me that specifically. They said: "We went into cogeneration not because it was going to be cheaper just because then we could guarantee there's power. We'll use all the power and then we'll sell the rest of the power at a discount down the line. Yes, we'll use some of the process heat, but we really don't need the process heat as much as we the need the electrical energy to pump it." This is Dow speaking. "We have a plant that if we don't start up again within 48 hours, we're shut down for a good length of time because we're freezing up," not in the classic sense of

freezing up in winter. "If we freeze up the process, we have to recatalyze and get all the systems up and running again. A shutdown is very expensive."

3:50

So here we have a government that for some unknown reason flew off and said, "Yeah, this is the direction we have to go," and they can't even provide the answers when the answers do exist. It is clear in black and white, and I'm willing to file it if anyone is interested, but certainly the minister has it in his office because that's where we must apply for freedom of information requests.

Madam Speaker, I would respectfully request that this motion for a return be accepted by the government. It may take a year or two to comply with, to find out what the information is, but it can be done.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion lost]

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

**Bill 203
Privatization Accountability Act**

Ms Barrett moved that the question for second reading be amended to read that Bill 203, the Privatization Accountability Act, be not now read a second time because the Legislative Assembly believes that a thorough cost-benefit analysis of all government privatized and contracted-out operations since 1990 is required involving public consultation before proceeding with this bill.

[Debate adjourned March 2: Ms Olsen speaking]

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. It's a pleasure to rise and speak to the amendment to Bill 203. The reasoned amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, the leader of the third party, I have looked at with interest. I have looked at the whole issue of privatization of government services in this province perhaps a lot closer than a lot of my hon. colleagues have had the opportunity to because I'm the Labour critic and the Labour department was such a department of wild experimentation going back to 1990.

When the leader of the third party introduced this reasoned amendment to Bill 203, she talked about the fast-tracking of privatization by the present government. Her statements, which I read with considerable interest, recognize the government haste that was involved in selling off both assets and services. The hon. member also pointed out, very wisely and astutely, that the taxpayers of Alberta in her estimation lost close to \$2 billion in all these transactions. The large sum of money lost confirms that we cannot, Madam Speaker, wait any longer on the questions surrounding the privatization of government services, and this is where the importance of Bill 203 lies.

Bill 203 already sets out a sound process. We don't have to wait any longer. Under Bill 203 the government would be required to follow a five-stage process in the evaluation and implementation of any further privatization of government programs and services. We all know -- and I spoke about this a little earlier -- about the history of government privatization and contracting out. No more public consultation, I'm afraid, is needed. What we need now is action, and this action will be provided in Bill 203.

The five stages that are set out in this I would like to review. As outlined, they are: there has to be a privatization profile, there has to be a cost-benefit analysis, there has to be a solicitation and bidding process, there have to be performance-based contracts and purchase agreements, and monitoring and oversight.

Madam Speaker, now is not the time for more public consultation, as we're talking about in this amendment, nor is it the time for more cost-benefit analysis. We need action now.

This legislation will prevent poorly implemented privatization initiatives such as the ones that the hon. member mentioned, Alberta Registries and the Swan Hills waste treatment plant. We all think of an industrial smokestack, and we see taxpayers' dollars just sucked into the updraft of that one and drifting down gently to Earth. We don't want to experience that again. We have CKUA. I can remember as a new member of the Assembly how startled I was with the fiasco that became CKUA. We look at the delegated administration organizations; I'm going to speak about that a little bit later at length. We look at the Alberta Tourism Partnership. We look at M & M Careers, Career Designs. We look at highway maintenance.

Just over a year ago in this Assembly we debated Motion 502. It is very important, when debating this amendment that is proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, that we know what was said in the past regarding this important issue, and I would like to go back to what was said about Motion 502. The New Democrats are saying:

Let's use some common sense when making decisions to privatize or contract out public services. Let's make sure the benefits outweigh the costs, and let's make sure that we calculate all the costs. That's the purpose of this motion. Those costs were never calculated, and we have ministers of the Crown bragging that they don't want to do those studies because it might demonstrate that it's not cost-efficient to do so. Remember that this includes costs to the public in the form of increased user fees.

Now, that's very interesting, because Bill 203 takes this into account. Bill 203 makes sure the benefits outweigh the costs. It ensures that all costs are calculated, and it provides a process to demonstrate public good or need.

As we go along further with the discussion of Motion 502 in the last session -- I believe it was February 10, 1998 -- I quote the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands again.

This government's privatization chickens are rapidly coming home to roost because of the reckless speed with which these decisions were made and the lack of safeguards put in place. This motion does not state that privatization should never occur, only that it should be done after a thorough examination of its costs compared to the benefits achieved; in other words, using common sense.

Bill 203 is common sense.

Madam Speaker, Bill 203 has the safeguards the member wants. What she talked about last year Bill 203 is doing this year. It puts in place and it provides a thorough examination of the costs compared to the benefits achieved. So that was then, and this is now.

As I said earlier, Madam Speaker, the department of labour and privatization. Privatization should not be ideologically driven. That is why Bill 203 was presented in this legislative session, because it will establish, as I talked about earlier, a systematic and well-documented process when considering the privatization of a government agency or activity.

We all know the troubles that are in the Department of Labour. There are a lot of initiatives that started and experiments that went on there. We look at the DAOs, and I can understand where the hon. leader of the third party is coming from. We have to look at the DAOs, and there's no finer place than the Department of Labour. We've got the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, which regulates the manufacture and use of pressure boilers and pressure vessels.

Well, the backlog of inspections is far overdue. We can't even find inspectors. We're looking across Canada for them, and we can't even find them.

4:00

We look at the Safety Codes Council and we look at the Occupational Health and Safety Council. These also operate as DAOs, and if they continue to operate, we're not going to need any of the cost-benefit analysis that the hon. member is talking about or any public consultation. What we're going to need, Madam Speaker, is a public inquiry. We cannot let this continue.

The hon. member earlier in her amendment said "cost-benefit analysis" and "public consultation." That would be fine in any other department but not the Department of Labour. There's this Safety Codes Council, the Building Technical Council, which is responsible for the Alberta Building Code. What are we going to do with this department? It's not enough that we have a cost-benefit analysis on it. The public consultation process has not worked. We're looking at a total system that's broken down. It has broken down. Now we're looking at allowing exemptions from any liability. This is quite interesting, Madam Speaker, that this has also occurred in the Department of Labour. Things have gone on so long, they're so bad, and the troubles are so deep that they're looking at exempting them from any sort of liability because they know they're in trouble. They admit it by actions like that, but the Department of Labour is in no position to protect the public in this province.

The delegated administrative organizations, the privatization that has occurred have not worked. I can't speak for other departments, but privatization is something that we have to look at cautiously, and we must look at the benefits, if there are any for any government department.

Review processes are fine. There has to be talk of what are core and what are noncore essential services, if there is such a thing. All this has to be open for discussion. We can't just talk about privatizing government services and creating a lot of part-time work with no benefits. That is not the process that should be involved.

With that comment on the hon. member's amendment, I would like to take my seat and allow any of my other hon. colleagues to speak on this very important issue of privatization.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to speak on the subject related to Bill 203, Privatization Accountability Act, sponsored by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I commend the hon. leader of the Liberal Party and the hon. leader of the NDP for help in confirming the notion of privatization by introducing the bill and the reasoned amendment.

First of all, I would like to speak to the reasoned amendment proposed by the hon. leader of the NDP. This government has undertaken all its privatization initiatives with careful thought and consideration. A cost-benefit analysis is included in the consideration of any business transaction, the operations the province has privatized and contracted out since 1990, and no exceptions. The cost associated with re-evaluating these transactions, Madam Speaker, would be enormous, taking valuable tax dollars away from other areas where funding could be better utilized.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, taking into consideration the fact that such an amendment is both unnecessary and costly, I am not in a position to support it. Certainly the intent of the bill and the proposed reasoned amendment is commendable, but while I support elements underlying the theme of openness and accountability, I am

unable to lend my support to this reasoned amendment.

Madam Speaker, essentially there are three reasons why I oppose the amendment. First, many provisions in Bill 203 and the amendment are simply repetitive of the spirit of current government policies and practice. Albertans need less legislation, not more. Number two, some provisions go too far, impairing the government's ability to negotiate the best deal for Alberta taxpayers. Number three, Bill 203 and its reasoned amendment go against the free spirit of Albertans in free enterprise and against the innovative approach needed for government operation.

To begin with, I would like to stress the importance our government has placed on conducting its business in an open and accountable manner. There are already numerous forums through which our government ensures that the public is kept up to date on these initiatives by carrying them out in an open and accountable fashion. In fact, Madam Speaker, I would emphasize that. This high level of government accountability is something upon which we as Albertans pride ourselves. This position was reflected in our government's mission statement, which commits this government to be an open and accountable government that leads the province in achieving its vision and ensures Albertans have access to quality programs and services at an affordable cost.

Madam Speaker, this is the philosophy and practice that ensures a balance between fiscal and social responsibilities, between meeting Albertans' needs as consumers of government services and as taxpayers. This approach allows for privatization under circumstances where it meets Albertans' needs. It is a responsible approach to government that Albertans over the last five years have told us is on the right course.

The debate we have today with members opposite is not a new debate. In fact, we have had this discussion in various forms before. Bill 203 and the proposed amendment appear to be nothing more than an opportunity for the members opposite to question this government's commitment to the principles I have just mentioned, principles, I might add, that enabled this province to get on the right track economically and tackle our net debt in the vigorous manner we did, principles that have allowed this government to operate in an efficient and innovative way which has been modeled by other provinces across Canada.

There are three basic and fully public documents in which this government lays open its priorities, initiatives, goals, and expenditures. The annual reports, departmental plans and budgets reveal to Albertans what programs taxpayers' money is spent on and how much of that money goes to each department and program.

Madam Speaker, this government put in place back in 1995 the Government Accountability Act, which legislates the requirement for procedures to improve government accountability to Albertans. Not only is accountability a principle behind which this government stands; it is the law of the land in this province. Among other requirements, the act requires that each department prepare a three-year business plan setting out detailed goals, strategies, and performance indicators for the upcoming three-year period. The act outlines the procedures by which annual reports are to be prepared in order to ensure their effectiveness. It also mandates that the Treasurer prepare a three-year consolidated fiscal plan, to be made public when estimates are tabled in the House each year. This plan must contain a detailed breakdown of revenues and expenditure both by department and for the government as a whole. The accuracy of these plans must be reported quarterly to the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

4:10

Madam Speaker, the main intent of Bill 203 and the amendment,

as I understand it, is to ensure that our provincial government follows systematic, transparent, and well-documented processes when considering whether or not to privatize a government asset or service. As is clear from the publications, meetings, and other forums which I have described, this systematic, transparent, and well-documented process already exists and is faring quite well in this province. The processes which I have just described apply to all government activities, including privatization of services and assets.

Each ministry has developed its own framework for privatization. Extensive work is done in crafting this framework in order to define the criteria to be used and the process by which the contract or the sales will be advertised. Ministries will also provide stakeholders with necessary information, receive and evaluate proposals, select an appropriate candidate, and negotiate the final transaction.

Each initiative out of each department is a little bit different, Madam Speaker. A process unique to each department is needed because each department has unique jurisdictions to protect. It is clear that in some way the private sector is far better in providing services than the government, or at the very least, where the quality of service is equivalent, the private sector is more efficient.

I'd also like to point out, Madam Speaker, that the stakeholders are an integral part of this privatization process. The government doesn't have all the answers for the best course of action right off the bat, but we must find out. Albertans and businesses have been instrumental in helping us find the right approach in order to be innovative and creative in how government policy objectives are achieved.

Though I respect the intent raised by these considerations, there are ways in which current processes of privatization and contracting out could actually be impeded. The proposed changes would have made transactions increasingly inflexible, making it necessary to run proposals through endless debate within the Assembly. These debates are important. However, in reserving that time for important elements, small insignificant details might well be left to the business process itself. It would be dissected and debated here. Indeed, through the budget and the estimates these processes are already available in the Assembly.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to note that the proposed amendment would cost taxpayers a great deal, drawing resources away from other programs and services. This does not reflect Albertans' priorities. They have told us that they want to see our tax dollars invested in four key areas, as the Lieutenant Governor discussed in the Speech from the Throne. They do not want to see their hard-earned dollars going to duplicate processes that are more expensive and unnecessary.

No one can deny that it is necessary in a business transaction to consider potential impacts. In fact, it is the basis of any business enterprise, keeping in mind: is it necessary to legislate something which would be done regardless? Should we amend this same legislation to invest time and money in reconsidering business transactions that have been completed almost a decade ago? Madam Speaker, it seems more than just a bit unreasonable.

These are just some of the reasons why I think it would be unwise to lend my support to Bill 203 and to this reasoned amendment.

I take this opportunity to commend the government to continue its good work and continue further improvement. We need to ensure that we are open and accountable to those who elect us. However, we must be cautious that we are not unnecessarily duplicating effective processes already in place or creating inflexibility which prevents us from doing what needs to be done. Based on my long experience in the corporate world before I joined the legislative world, I am concerned that Bill 203 and its reasoned amendment will

discourage the free enterprise spirit of Albertans and stifle innovative approaches needed in the government operation.

With that, I thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 203, the Privatization Accountability Act, as well as to address the motion that was put forward by the Member for Edmonton-Highlands. I listened very closely to the comments from the Member for Calgary-Fort and was surprised, quite frankly, at how he jumped from the notion of openness and accountability to the conclusion that in fact this bill was not required and would stifle any initiatives that have been put forward by the government and would cost Alberta taxpayers as opposed to saving costs.

The reason I say it's surprising is that when I look -- and these are not the words of any member of the Official Opposition but are words from the Auditor General, who you would assume is a bit of a financial watchdog on the operations of the government. He makes very clear the need for this particular bill. He has indicated in his annual report for '96 and '97 that:

The fundamental elements of governance and accountability remain the same regardless of whether services are provided by government employees, a private sector contractor, or a delegated administrative entity such as a non-profit foundation. These elements consist of defining the roles and responsibilities of the parties, agreement of measurable expectations to be achieved for funding provided, effective monitoring and reporting of actual performance in relation to expectations, and analysis and subsequent refinement based on results. . . . Contract performance must be monitored, results must be analyzed, and corrective action must be taken on a timely basis.

Furthermore, he indicates:

There is a risk that contracting will not be a cost-effective replacement for in-house provision of services. As a prerequisite to contracting, existing performance levels must be clearly defined to permit analysis of the costs and benefits and to serve as a benchmark for contracted performance standards. The full costs of each alternative should be properly identified and analyzed, including the effects on costs of other departments, other levels of government, and the public.

In fact, when we look at what the total impact of privatization has been over the last number of years, since the government has followed the current Minister of Energy model of privatization, what we have found is that there is no real cost-benefit analysis of the effects of privatization. What we are starting to hear more and more is that people are recognizing that the costs have been downloaded to them, so in fact they are almost doubly taxed when it comes to services that were once provided through government and are now being provided by private entities such as the former ALCB, registries, and other privatized services. When we look at addressing the issues of openness and accountability and cost savings to the public, one only has to think back to the fiasco around the privatization of CKUA and the costs to the taxpayers that were incurred as a result of that particular fiasco.

4:20

The bill was put forward in a responsible manner in order to ensure, if the government decides to go down the road of privatization again, that there is a framework, that there are in fact barriers so we would not have the instance of a minister of the Crown indicating that privatization is ideologically driven and that there is no thought at all given as to whether or not there is any purpose in the privatization.

If I can just quote a number of comments that that particular minister did make. He indicated that the key step to deciding if it's a business the government should be in is determined by what you know, that in fact there are no definitive studies that are required, that it's just what you know. So if there's an inherent bias to privatize government services, that basically is good enough. At least that's what appears to be the nature of the comments. He then further goes on to indicate that you have to do it fast, that there can't be any time for anyone to really look at the impact of the privatization, and that if you kill the bureaucracy, you in fact also diminish any opposition and perhaps any reasoned voice to privatization that might well occur.

So we know and we have seen that this is not the way to go. We know that as a result of privatization over the last number of years, there has been incredible fallout with individuals who have lost their jobs, with individuals who have lost the ability to access benefits and to access jobs at more than or close to minimum wage and with part-time status only. As a result, we have seen a negative effect on the economy with regards to individuals who have the ability to contribute to ensuring that there would be a flow of dollars into the economy based on what their ability is to pay. We've seen that in terms of the increased number of bankruptcies in this province -- we're just starting to get out of that particular cycle -- and in the increased number of individuals who have been unemployed and have dropped off the unemployment rolls.

The reality is that when we look at this particular bill and the amendment to the bill, which unfortunately I cannot support, we see that there is thought given to what would happen if one were to privatize a government service. The reason that the amendment I believe is not applicable at this point in time is that it allows the government to continue. If we were to not pass the bill in its form, what in fact happens because of the amendment is that it allows the government to continue its willy-nilly approach to privatization. I know that the members on this side of the House in the Official Opposition do not want to see that occur.

I agree that there has to be a thorough cost-benefit analysis of what has happened to services within the government sector that have been privatized. For instance, I can think right away of transportation and whether or not in fact we are achieving any of the benefits that the government told us we would achieve through the privatization of transportation and transportation services. Another area would be in terms of computer services, whether or not we are in fact achieving any benefits through the privatization of computer services to private entities. I would really hate to see us not have a mechanism in place should the government decide to privatize any other area within government. For that reason alone I cannot support the particular amendment that's been put forward by the leader of the New Democrat opposition.

I know that the bill is a bill that in fact looks at trying to rectify some of the situations we saw in this House with regards to privatization over the last number of years, so that the government does not have free rein. What in fact the bill does allow as well -- and I know this is a concern that some unions have had, in particular unions that deal with government -- is with regards to being able to bid on projects that may be privatized through government. A union such as CUPE, for instance, in schools throughout this province might be able to bid on the contracting out of custodial services if that were ever to occur. Because there have been a number of studies that have been done by CUPE with regards to the potential privatization of custodial services, we know that in fact it is not cost effective to do that. If we had a bill in place such as this, then the government would have those studies and would be forced to admit that custodial services is not an area that should be looked at in terms

of privatization. At this point in time we don't have anything that constrains the government with regards to doing that.

This bill, as I indicated, provides a broad range of structure when it comes to looking at privatization. What I find interesting to note as well -- and my hon. colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar has admitted to it -- is that when the New Democrats put forward Motion 502, which has some of the same ideas that we have fleshed out in our particular bill, in fact at that point in time there was no indication that there needed to be a moratorium on further privatization. So, again, that is a motion I would not endorse.

Now, I know there are some other issues that have been put forward with regards to privatization. Perhaps there are certain areas in this bill where, if we were to move into Committee of the Whole, we could look at bringing in further amendments with regards to the wages that employees would receive if an area of government were to be looked at in terms of privatization, maybe look at the process of determining the difference between core and noncore services, if we want to go down that route.

I would submit that at this point in time, unless the process shows us otherwise, services within government are core, and that's why it's essential to have a process that looks at the cost benefit, that looks at the kinds of services the government is providing at this point in time, and that structures it in such a way that it is not driven by philosophy solely. There could be reference made to previous privatization efforts being assessed, but in order to do that, we need to move forward with this particular bill.

As I indicated earlier, the recommendations for this bill come not solely from the Official Opposition but from the recommendations of the Auditor General as well as other interested participants in this process as well as other stakeholders who have recognized that there is a need. In our bill it's a five-stage process in the area of privatization. When we look at the specifics of the bill, we see that the process is well thought out. We're looking at stage 1 being a privatization profile, stage 2 being a cost-benefit analysis, stage 3 being the solicitation or bidding process, stage 4 being the performance-based contracts, and stage 5 being the monitoring and oversight.

4:30

So if any of the government members feel that this is too onerous, the question that I put to them is: what would be their process for reviewing and ensuring that services that are being looked at in the future for contracting out do in fact meet the bar that the Auditor General put forward in his review of the effects of privatization within this province?

There is a considerable amount of research that has been performed on the effectiveness of privatization within the public sector. What we are starting to hear from that research is that the headlong rush towards privatization in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, and Britain have indicated in fact that there were not the cost savings there and that in fact there was the inability to control the quality of the service that was provided as well.

What has also started to come through loud and clear -- and we're seeing some of it. This is a little off topic, but we're seeing some of it with regards to the regional health authorities. What we're starting to see within the private-sector companies that have been structured around public-sector services is that there's a tendency to build up bureaucracies. So in fact what we've ended up doing is transferring, if you want to call it that, the red tape, the regulation, from the public sector to the private sector, and it's costing us more and without any open scrutiny as to where those dollars are going.

In particular, if anyone is interested in following up on what has happened in Britain, the quangos are a prime example of what

occurred with regards to the privatization there and the proliferation of quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organizations that have sprung up and that in fact are costing the taxpayer more with a lot less accountability than the public sector. [interjection] Now, I notice that there are some members on the opposite side of the House who seem to have some different information. I think it would be useful for them to enter the discussion as well, because in fact the information that I have is very clear that there are no savings to the taxpayer with regards to what is happening there.

The concept -- and the Member for Calgary-Fort alluded to it -- that the private sector does everything more efficiently than the government is a concept that I for one would love to have an open, full debate on within this Legislative Assembly as well as outside this Legislative Assembly. I think the members opposite would be surprised at the number of individuals throughout Alberta who do not share that concept, who feel that there is a role for government. If I can also segue a little bit into the whole role of public and private health care, the reality is that that is a prime example of an institution that is cheaper, more effective, more efficient, and better able to meet the needs of Albertans than the private system ever will be. When we look at the Privatization Accountability Act, in fact this is an act that could provide a framework when we're looking at thoughts along those lines.

As was indicated, we recognize health care as being one of those services that we would never look at privatizing in terms of providing core services for Albertans. There are numerous studies that indicate that public health care is something that we need to treasure and cherish in this province.

In fact, this act sets up, as I indicated earlier, an accountability framework. It tries to address some of the concerns we've heard over the years from the various stakeholder groups across the province, groups that have sometimes been dramatically and drastically affected by the shortsightedness and heavy-handedness of this government in terms of privatization. In fact, this bill will help address not only the concerns of some of those stakeholders but also the concerns of the Auditor General and will provide for more openness, will provide for more accountability, will provide for a more responsible approach to government.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Privatization Accountability Act, sponsored by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. Let me open, however, by addressing the amendment proposed by the hon. leader of the NDs. It is our commitment to the people of this province to lay out processes and products before them openly and frankly so that they may know what their government is doing and give input about which direction they would like that government to go. This has been true of all our government processes, and it has been true in our efforts to get the government out of the business of being in business.

This amendment, Madam Speaker, is completely unnecessary, and I cannot support it. Bill 203, the Privatization Accountability Act, is ultimately based on concepts . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a) I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate on Bill 203.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I very much appreciate the participation of all members, both the Official

Opposition and the ND opposition and the government members, in speaking to this debate.

We believe the issue of privatization is one that deserves our attention as legislators, especially an accountability for privatization, which we haven't seen from some of the actions of privatization which this government has undertaken. We believe this provides a mechanism for looking at the whole issue of privatization and then measuring the costs and the benefits of that privatization exercise. Obviously we are referring in the legislation to privatization of only noncore services and the necessary review of the impact on public services and people's jobs that we see each day, particularly when government has taken the decision to move to privatization of certain entities and has apparently forgotten the impact on some of the people that work within those endeavours.

Nonetheless, we accept that the role of the Official Opposition is to propose. I guess we're not too surprised that the government has taken the position it has. Nonetheless, I thank the members of the government who have participated in the debate. I think it will perhaps further this issue along. We offer up this suggestion to government as something that might be helpful to them in the future, and I would very much urge hon. members to support the legislation which is before us today.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment lost]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the bill itself. All those in favour of second reading of Bill 203, Privatization Accountability Act, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It is defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:40 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Barrett	Leibovici	Pannu
Blakeman	MacBeth	Sapers
Bonner	MacDonald	Soetaert
Carlson	Massey	White
Dickson	Nicol	Wickman
Gibbons	Olsen	

Against the motion:

Amery	Haley	O'Neill
Broda	Hancock	Pham
Burgener	Hierath	Renner
Calahasen	Hlady	Severtson
Cao	Jacques	Shariff
Cardinal	Johnson	Stelmach
Coutts	Jonson	Stevens
Day	Klapstein	Strang
Doerksen	Laing	Tannas

Fischer	Lougheed	Taylor
Forsyth	Lund	Trynchy
Friedel	Marz	Woloshyn
Fritz	McClellan	Yankowsky
Graham	Melchin	Zwozdesky
Totals:	For -- 17	Against -- 42

[Motion lost]

Bill 204 Medicare Protection Act

MS BARRETT: What a pleasure to sponsor this bill, the Medicare Protection Act, known as Bill 204 on our Order Paper. This bill will enshrine publicly funded, universal, not-for-profit health care once and for all for all Albertans.

Bill 204 would force all invasive medical procedures requiring overnight stays to be provided in a hospital run on a not-for-profit basis, which of course is in accordance with the Hospitals Act, the act the government tries to get around with bills such as Bill 37. It will explicitly set out all the rights that the people of Alberta have vis-à-vis health care: the right to medical services regardless of where they live, the right to have medically necessary services provided in a not-for-profit hospital.

Furthermore, this bill will establish a committee that would have extensive and open consultations with the public in order to assist the Minister of Health in making decisions. This open and consultative process stands in stark contrast to the current government's tendencies to limited and closed-door consultations, the health summit notwithstanding, during which last weekend ordinary Albertans stood up on their hind legs and fought back, categorically speaking out against private, for-profit hospitals and other health provisions.

The jurisdiction of this committee could include the list of insured and deinsured services. As members know, it is generally within the realm of regulation, not legislation, that the minister can either add or take away from the list of insured services. In the last 15 years the orientation has been consistently to delete items from insured services.

The committee would also look at appropriate funding and staff levels, the terms and conditions for physicians opting out of medicare, a bill that the government did attempt to sponsor last year, Bill 21, which enjoyed the support of the New Democrat caucus. The committee would also be looking at equitable regional funding and the feasibility of expanding medicare to prescription drugs, home care, and, dare I say, a provincewide ambulance service, which has been the call of the NDP since at least the late Grant Notley was around if not much longer ago than that.

Bill 204 would resolve many of the current anomalies in the health care system that the government allows to exist and perpetuate. I give you an example. Doctors who opt out of medicare currently are allowed to use the publicly owned, publicly paid for health care facilities that we call hospitals without having to reimburse the taxpayers for the use of such facilities, while in contrast the taxpayers are expected to pick up the tab for fees at facilities owned and operated by those who are in the business of making profit off health care services, some of which I declare to be core services.

I believe that the government will have a hard time rejecting this bill, unless it is prepared to say in advance of the government's blue-ribbon panel reporting, as I understand, next week on the fate and status of Bill 37 -- unless of course the government is still inclined to allow and promote private, for-profit hospitals. I can see no other

reason for government members to reject this bill but for that purpose.

There is a personal reason related to medicare that I became a New Democrat, the first person in my rather large family to have joined any political party or made any stab at any political party persuasion. I grew up in a large family, a total of seven children, with an income of one parent for many years, and a very low income at that, from a father who was away as much as he could be, given the nature of his job, which means that I was raised essentially, as were my siblings, by my mother virtually singlehandedly.

As a child I recall using the typical excuse for not going to bed: coming down the stairs and saying, "Mommy, I need a glass of water." Well, one time -- I believe I was about five or six years old -- I started to come downstairs. I could look through the banister rails, and I saw my mother sitting at what we euphemistically called a dining room table, it being constructed of chrome and very cheap arborite, the cheque book in front of her, her eyeglasses on the table beside her, and her head in her hands, clearly in despair. I can't believe that I was sensitive or intelligent enough not to interrupt my mother. I went back upstairs, but the next day I asked her what she was crying about. It was, she confessed to me, "Don't worry about it; just having a hard time keeping up with the medical bills and the dental bills," not knowing which one to pay -- in those days there was no such thing as overdraft -- without getting into financial trouble. My mother loved her seven children equally.

I realized right away upon the introduction of medicare in Saskatchewan a few years later, in 1961, that this would be something that would work very well and would help families like mine, which didn't choose to be poor and were just rendered that way despite all of the hard work on behalf of the parent or parents.

5:00

In 1965 I found out that the two opposition parties in Saskatchewan, one of whom has subsequently mended its ways partially, had actually orchestrated the doctors' strike which ensued with the introduction of medicare, not only medicare doctors being paid directly by a single payer system but also the administration of public hospitals under a public hospital act. I found out that those two parties were the Liberals and the Conservatives. I came home from school that day having benefited from this wisdom from my teacher Ms Gazderika, of whom I remain in search, and walked into the house and said, "Mommy, I'm NDP," and I was thereafter, because of medicare, because I grew up in an environment where I knew that all of those bills could not be paid for all seven of those children and that maybe one day a serious accident would befall any one of us and we would not be able to get the health care that we needed.

Since that day I've developed a much different consciousness about medicare, not just from a personal perspective but also from the perspective of having lived very close to and often in the inner city itself in Edmonton and seeing the need that would otherwise be ignored if we did not have a comprehensive medicare program in Alberta and in Canada. I salute time and again my federal counterparts who in 1966, holding the balance of power, did force the federal government into initiating a national program.

I believe that without a bill such as the Medicare Protection Act, the Alberta government wishes to be the organization that opens the door to the destruction of medicare by allowing passively or actively, depending on which way the College of Physicians and Surgeons goes, depending on which way the blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37 goes, the introduction and establishment and perpetuation, I should add, of private, for-profit hospitals, which I know firsthand to be of direct impairment to the public health care system.

I'm going to have to learn to not speak in paragraphs, Mr.

Speaker. The reason I know this firsthand is because of having done my masters in Britain at the very time that the Margaret Thatcher government not only allowed private, for-profit hospitals but actually fostered them. On each occasion in which an individual was treated in a private, for-profit hospital or by a private, for-profit clinician, fewer pounds sterling were thereafter dedicated to the national health service. The argument that was used was: oh, well, people clearly can afford to pay, which means those that can will, and that means fewer dollars, or in their case pounds, are required to sustain the national health service. The national health service now stands in ruins physically and in terms of its capacity to provide for people in need of health care.

The bill says no -- and reflects the sentiments expressed so overwhelmingly at last week's health summit -- to private, for-profit hospitals, and in so doing takes away implicitly the ability of the College of Physicians and Surgeons to develop guidelines which would do nothing but usher in private, for-profit hospitals. In fact, this bill would go so far as to grandfather the private, for-profit clinics that do exist in Alberta at this point, primarily because it's the taxpayers who are picking up the facility fees that were previously charged by the organizations that run them. Those facility fees constitute in my assessment their profit line, and when the federal government rightly said that it is against the Canada Health Act for individuals to be paying those facility fees and fined the Alberta government, the federal government did the right thing.

The province, however, in its stubborn-mindedness said: well, if you're going to do that, then we're going to get around the Canada Health Act rules; we'll pick up -- the government, meaning the taxpayers -- those facility fees. In essence, the cost to the Alberta taxpayers of having these private, for-profit clinics virtually tripled. In other words the penalty being levied in the form of transfer payments denied by the federal government to the province was one-third of what the province now picks up in the form of facility fees to these private, for-profit organizations.

It's time to put a stop to the private, for-profit companies seeking out their profits from the taxpayer system. If they want to make money, go on their own, but no double-dipping. That is the bottom line of this bill. If you want to be in the business of providing health care, do it under the public umbrella, and if you've really got the guts to want to go out and do it as a private, for-profit enterprise -- which I would oppose in any event -- have the guts to do it without dipping into the taxpayers' pockets or purses.

I believe this bill would also, because of its committee structure, prevent problems that have occurred with the unelected health boards and the ones which are disaffected, such as the Lakeland health board, which has been fired from its job. Because the scope of its mandate would allow it to assess funding levels, staff levels, regional needs, et cetera, problems could be anticipated in advance of their occurrence and therefore not develop.

Our flagship bill on behalf of the New Democratic caucus is a comprehensive protection bill for public health care. I can see no reason, no reasonable argument for opposition to this bill, other than a categorical avoidance of the concept that it upholds most clearly, that being wholehearted objection to private, for-profit hospitals and further development of private, for-profit health care clinics and service providers.

I look forward to the support this bill may enjoy.

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

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to address the House on Bill 204. [interjections] I am encouraged. Thank you.

As I said in my reply to the Speech from the Throne, health care is one of the most important issues in my constituency of Calgary-Glenmore as well as to all of the residents of Calgary. It is because of this that I cannot support Bill 204 as it now stands and instead introduce a reasoned amendment which reads as follows: be it resolved that the motion for second reading of Bill 204 be amended by deleting all words after the word "That" and substituting

Bill 204, the Medicare Protection Act, be not now read a second time because the Legislative Assembly believes that the report that is pending from the health summit should be reviewed before proceeding with this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I have the requisite number of copies of the proposed amendment.

Over the last year or so the city of Calgary and neighbouring communities like Airdrie have grown at a remarkable pace. This is clear testament to the fact that Alberta has been the best province in Canada in which to live. Recommendations from the health summit will help our government meet the health care needs of this growing population.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 204 would suggest that public health care doesn't exist. Nothing could be further from the truth. The health care system in Calgary is publicly funded and is accessible to all. To maintain the system, our government has increased funding for health care over the past three years, with additional funding for Calgary to deal with their recent population growth.

Our government increased health spending by adding \$750 million to the 1995 core health budget over a period of three years. That's a 20 percent increase over that time, supplied entirely by the province of Alberta. Mr. Speaker, of the \$750 million increase over the last three years, \$200 million of that went to the Calgary region, 90 million of that within the last year. Our government also gave the Calgary regional health authority a further \$27 million this year to deal with staffing and emergency room pressures.

Mr. Speaker, if the New Democrat opposition wants to complain about a government not fulfilling the principles of the Canada Health Act, they should take issue with the federal government. Between 1993 and '98 the federal government completely ignored the principle of publicly funded health care by cutting the Canada health and social transfer to provinces by more than \$6 billion. Thankfully, with the Premier's leadership and work with other provinces, the federal government has recently restored some funding to our province.

5:10

The second part of Bill 204 would establish an advisory committee to help government develop long-term plans for the health care system. For sure our government is a strong believer in maintaining a consultation plan for key government programs. Mr. Speaker, that is why our government initiated the health summit process in the first place. The health summit helped develop some very valuable suggestions for our health care system. They are suggestions we need to examine and work to implement.

Also on the subject of consultation we have regional health authorities and community health councils who work on the front lines and interact with patients and health care professionals on a daily basis. They're there at the ground level and can react quickly to local needs or inform the government if sufficient changes are needed.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, we recognized that there was a need for still further consultation with Albertans. For that reason the Minister of Health encouraged all Members of the Legislative Assembly to hold community health summits in their own constituencies. I was very pleased to host a health summit for the residents of Calgary-Glenmore last month, and I understand that a number of my

colleagues have held or have plans to hold summits of their own.

Mr. Speaker, part three of Bill 204 also concerns me greatly. Of course our government is concerned about the role that private health care providers play in our system. The Minister of Health was greatly concerned and proposed legislation which would have brought increased accountability into this sector. We felt that we could adequately address the concerns by bringing in Bill 37. Bill 37 was opposed by the member opposite. It is with interest that I note that the principles contained within Bill 37 were recently endorsed by the ND government in Saskatchewan.

Bill 204 would eliminate almost entirely the private diagnostic, treatment, and seniors' nursing care facilities in our province. This would have a tremendously negative impact on the residents of Calgary, particularly our aging population. Studies have shown, Mr. Speaker, that in many cases in the Calgary regional health authority area many of the best long-term care health facilities include private facilities. Many of them have provided care quality above and beyond what is required by the government for over 40 years.

In addition, a recent bulletin from the Calgary regional health authority encouraged Calgary physicians to move all outpatient imaging to private community-based radiology clinics because those clinics were more efficient, saved the CRHA significant costs, and increased public access to the service. Bill 204 would also outlaw the innovative new public/private partnerships that are presently developing in this province.

Mr. Speaker, there are two new initiatives under way in Calgary that are shining examples of what can be achieved in a public/private partnership. These initiatives are of high quality, they are cost efficient, and they would be illegal under Bill 204. A partnership between the Calgary regional health authority and MDS Kasper Lab called Calgary Laboratory Services is an innovative and efficient lab testing service that could very well be a model for the future. It could also be applied in other parts of the province. Formed in 1996, Calgary Lab Services is jointly owned and operates a large lab as well as several smaller testing facilities. Coupled with 110 community collection sites established around the city, CLS labs can service the lab and testing needs of all Calgary.

In the first year of CLS's operation the total cost of lab fees for the city of Calgary decreased from \$97 million to \$67 million. I'm proud to support an initiative that can save taxpayers \$30 million a year with no loss in services. New Democrats should support these initiatives as well. I think Liberals should too.

Also in the city of Calgary a long-term care facility and seniors' apartment complex called Royal Park has been turning heads. Royal Park is a partnership between the Calgary regional health authority and Apex apartment developers providing independent living facilities and long-term care for hundreds of Calgary seniors. The RHA and the developer were able to invest more money into conveniences and services by sharing building costs, by constructing both facilities in the same vicinity. The apartment complex is a privately owned, independent living facility that has been celebrated for its modern conveniences and design. It is conveniently situated adjacent to the nursing facility, which also has very modern equipment and services for its residents. Moreover, the proximity allows for an easy transfer of residents from one facility to another as they progress in years and their needs change.

Mr. Speaker, this complex is one of a kind, and it is so popular, it is nearly sold out. It's providing a tremendous service to its residents and will certainly be used as a model for future seniors'

facilities around Alberta, but for some reason the New Democrats would prefer to close it down.

Our government recognizes, Mr. Speaker, that there is a great deal we need to do to ensure that our health care system is equipped to handle the challenges and demands of the next century. The first thing we can do is to support the health summit process and emphasize its important role in developing a long-term health strategy. We have heard many of the recommendations from the health summit already. It's important that all recommendations receive careful study and examination. We must honour our commitment to implement Albertans' priorities for the health care system, and to do that, we must focus on the health care summit results before we focus on Bill 204.

I'd urge all of my colleagues to vote in favour of the reasoned amendment at this time.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to move adjournment of debate on Bill 204.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion put forward by the hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, would all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: All those opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:18 p.m.]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, attentiveness to what's going on in the House is a prime requisite. On two occasions today there have been interruptions. Errors presumably have been made. So I will now ask the question and it will require unanimous consent.

Would all the members in favour of eradicating the call for a division, please say aye?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Would those opposed, please say no?

THE SPEAKER: Carried.

Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we call it 5:30 and that when we reconvene at 8 p. m., we do so in Committee of the Whole.

THE SPEAKER: Would all those members in favour of the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader, please say aye?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Carried.

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