

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 24, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/03/24

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

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

Amen.

Please be seated, including those of you who missed St. Patrick's Day by a week.

head: Presenting Petitions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, do you have a petition today?

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would file a petition from the SOS group 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.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to table with the House today a fire ban that we're putting in effect tomorrow at noon. It covers a large part of the province in southern Alberta. There's a map connected with this for all hon. members.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd table the required number of copies of correspondence between the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and the Premier, through his chief of staff, regarding salary increases granted through the Executive Council.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I was just going through the latest copy of the *Economist* and found an interesting comparison in industrial disputes for the G-8 countries – we were able to add Alberta on – showing that Alberta has one-one hundredth of the amount of days lost due to disputes than the lowest reporting country in the G-8.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two tablings today. One is from Neil Parry in my riding. His letter was sent to the education funding review committee. He expresses his concerns that due to lack of funding in education his child now has to share math textbooks, they're crowded in a classroom, and that things are getting rather critical in the school his children attend.

The second one is from David LaSuisse from Poundmaker's

Lodge to the chair of the board asking for the meeting that the minister indicated would happen tomorrow night and indicating what they would like to see at that meeting, setting a time and a place as well at the Chateau Louis. So they've made it very clear in their recommendations to the board.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I've got four documents to table: firstly, correspondence from the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie to the chair of the designated subcommittee of supply for Environmental Protection and the response from that member dated March 22; further, the letter from the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods dated March 23 to the chair of the designated supply subcommittee on Education and the response from that member dated March 23 as well.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table two documents this afternoon. The first is on behalf of a constituent, Mrs. Judith Evans. She is writing to the Premier and to the Minister of Education expressing her "profound disappointment" with the amount that has been chosen to reinvest in education in this province.

The second tabling this afternoon is a copy of a letter I received yesterday from the Alberta Teachers' Association president, Bauni Mackay. She is outlining her "serious concerns" with the "elimination of the Board of Reference in Bill 20."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to table the required number of copies of e-mails that I have received from across Canada and some from the United States, citizens expressing their opposition to Bill 6. I received these subsequent to third reading of Bill 6 and would like to register them in the Assembly to note these citizens' opposition.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 31 very special guests from the Vegreville Sunshine Club. The tour director is Ms Marie Dmytriw. They're accompanied by their president, Mr. William, otherwise known as Bill, Dascavich. Also accompanying them is a gentleman from the Shandro area that has pioneered canola production in this province dating back to the early '70s, Mr. George B. Kapitski. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. CLEGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour and a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly Mr. Henry Vos. Henry Vos is the vice-

chairman of the board of governors at Fairview College, and he's also president of the Alberta Seed Growers. I would ask Henry to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to our colleagues in the Legislative Assembly five guests from the Airdrie-Rocky View constituency. They live in Crossfield. I'd like to introduce Dan and Donna Fensky and their three children, Dara, Serena, and Trevor, and ask that they stand and please receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to the Assembly four members from the Rocky Mountain House constituency living in the Sundre-Caroline area. They are Keith Eslinger, Alice Murray, Dr. Cheryl Waldner, and Brian Goliss. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly some very special guests seated in the members' gallery. They are five members of the University of Alberta Pandas volleyball team, who on March 7 won their fifth consecutive national women's volleyball championship. They have been outstanding ambassadors for Alberta and excellent role models for all Alberta's young women. I would ask them to stand when I introduce them. With us today are Heather Buckmaster, Jenny Cartmell, who is the CIAU most valuable player, Katrin Schnadt, Maria Wahlstrom, and Alyssa Wionzek. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I would invite members to join me in recognizing these fine athletes and give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

1:40

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly two Albertans who come from my constituency of Fort McMurray. They are Cathy Macdonald, who is the executive director of the Northern Lights regional health authority foundation board as well as a board director of the Chamber of Commerce, and also Carolyn Baikie, who is the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce. They're in the public gallery, and I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Education Funding

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, having had time to do the math, parents and teachers are realizing that this government's not going to be investing \$600 million in our schoolchildren next year. To paraphrase an Edmonton journalist: the positive first

blush response to the budget's three-year, \$600-million increase in education funding is melting faster than spring snow. The grim reality is sinking in that overcrowded schools, large and split classes, and endless fund-raising will continue despite the hype and the spin from the government. My questions are to the Premier. Can the Premier inform parents and teachers from Vulcan, Alberta, specifically how much money will be available to make the Hazel Cameron school safe to learn in?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the questions are specific to the hon. Minister of Education, and I'll ask him to respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the first thing that I'd like to say is that the Leader of the Opposition, in the preamble to her question, made an error with respect to the \$600 million. She knows and she knows that this government has said that the \$600 million is over a three-year period, so she should not suggest in any way, shape, or form that the \$600 million was intended for the upcoming year. It's \$600 million over three years, and she knows that. She knows that in the first year there's \$222 million, and in the following years it totals up to \$600 million. So it's \$3.14 billion this year, and it'll go to \$3.74 billion in the year 2000-2001. So that's the first thing that I wanted to correct.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Hazel Cameron school, I did make a commitment to go to that school to see firsthand what the issues were in Vulcan. I made that commitment roughly six weeks ago, and I did attend that school to take a look at it, and I met with the people at the school council. There are some legitimate issues and concerns that are there. We expect that the school board will have a plan in place on how to deal with those issues. The appropriate amount of money will be spent to make sure that issues as they relate to the health and safety concerns that may exist at Hazel Cameron school will be dealt with appropriately.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does the actual increase mean that the schools in the village of Hines Creek will now be able to rehire the teachers and the teacher aides that they've let go this year?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition was at one time an Education minister, and she knows, of course, that school boards have the whole responsibility for the hiring of staff and the delivery of programs to students in their jurisdictions. That's the reason why we hire them through the election process. So on the one hand the Leader of the Opposition cannot say that we should take responsibility for this and then suggest that there should be an assumption of responsibility on the part of school trustees.

Mr. Speaker, we have invested a great deal of money in education. We transfer those dollars through for student grants and other types of grants to school boards. It is incumbent upon school boards to make specific decisions, so with respect to this particular school it is within the responsibility of the school board. I expect that that school board, as with school boards throughout the province, will assume that responsibility and deal with the issues accordingly.

MRS. MacBETH: Finally, Mr. Speaker, I think we'd better go back to the Premier and try for some answers.

With this budget can the Premier assure parents that the forced triple grading, not split grades but triple grading, for students in the Amisk school will end?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member of the Liberal opposition – and I'm going to answer this in a global sense – concentrates on the small problems. [interjections]

No, no. Well, go to Rio Terrace school here in Edmonton. Go to the Talmud Torah school here in Edmonton. Go to Alex Taylor school; I'm a friend of Alex Taylor. I donate to that school quite regularly and participate in that school. Go to Huntington Hills school in Red Deer. Go to Assumption school in Oyen, where they have the highest achievement rates in the province.

You know, she alludes to one school in Vulcan. One school. For every one school I can name 15 schools that are doing perfectly okay. And she knows that, but she doesn't want to go there. She doesn't want to go there because that's not the Liberal agenda. The Liberal agenda is to do mischief, to create controversy, to provide an environment of confrontation, to lead Albertans who believe that this is the best province in which to live that there's chaos. No, we don't want to do that. So for every one school she points out, Mr. Speaker, from now on I'm going to name 15 that are doing just perfectly.

Thank you.

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

Edmonton Public School Board

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. With glowing remarks about their superintendent the Premier has described the Edmonton public schools as "one of the best education systems in the country, perhaps in North America . . ." [interjections] It's a good one. ". . . perhaps in the world." But 15 months later his Minister of Education describes these same educational leaders as reckless and needing to do their homework. My questions are to the Premier. What has happened in the last 15 months that the Edmonton public schools have deteriorated so badly in the eyes of this government?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would invite the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition – let's not make this a media circus. Come down to my office, we'll pick up the phone, we'll talk to Emery Dossdell, and find out, you know, who is right or who is wrong.

There's seems to be about a \$10 million discrepancy – that's a lot of money, you know – between their number crunchers and our number crunchers. I happen to . . . [interjections] No, no. Well, I'm challenging the hon. member to come to my office. We'll pick up the phone. [interjections] Well, no. If she wants to invite me to her office, we'll pick it up. Right? We'll pick it up and put it on a conference call, and we'll find out who's right or who's wrong, Mr. Speaker.

I happen to believe the hon. Minister of Education and his officials that, in fact, the numbers that he presented and that were presented in a news release were the correct numbers. Now, if the hon. member wants to participate with me in a phone call to the superintendent of the Edmonton public school system, Mr. Dossdall, I'd be glad to open up my doors. Come on in. Let's pick up the phone, and see who's right and see who's wrong.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Calgary board of education was audited when it dared to stand up for children in public education, will the government now conduct a similar witch hunt against the schools in the Edmonton public schools?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the offer is also open to phone Teresa Woo-Paw and find out if indeed that is the case. I want this hon. member to ask Ms Woo-Paw if indeed we are conducting a witch hunt.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Not much in terms of substance here.

Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections] They're touchy today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Minister of Education through his executive assistant called the 4 percent increase for Edmonton teachers unconscionable, how does the Premier justify his 14.7 percent increase in executive assistant salaries?

MR. KLEIN: I'll defer that too. Mr. Speaker, in all fairness, this was a conversation, obviously, between a member of the Liberal opposition or one of their researchers . . . [interjection] No, no. Or one of their researchers to an executive assistant of the minister's. I'll have the minister respond.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say this: with respect to the instructional grant rate increases I'm happy to say that Bauni Mackay told me to my face, and issued a press release saying that the news of a 3 percent instructional grant rate increase would be wonderful news, and that she would be euphoric. I think that the leader of the Alberta Teachers' Association, the leader of that association throughout the province – it strikes me that her comments were extremely good ones and well thought out.

Mr. Speaker, I just want people to know that local boards have the responsibility of negotiating with their locals of the Alberta Teachers' Association, but whenever there is an increase that is agreed to by a school board that exceeds the rate of inflation, obviously there are a number of effects that the school board will have to be responsible for that might include things like increased classroom size.

I'll say this as a final word, Mr. Speaker: I'd be happier to defend my 19 percent increase over the next three years than the 3 percent decrease that the Leader of the Opposition marshaled through in 1987.

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

Foster Parent Program

MRS. SLOAN: When the Minister of Family and Social Services committed to implementing asset testing for AISH, he allowed his personal bias to overrule the opinions of stakeholders that were consulted. Last week the government announced that Family and Social Services policy would clearly state that foster care placements were being made on the basis of what was in the best interests of the child. Again the minister this week imposed his personal bias to overrule the opinions of others and enact a policy in his department contradicting this position. My first question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain how the Minister of Family and Social Services can subject same-sex foster families to a personal scrutiny test when this is not the standard applied to all foster families in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that is indeed the prerogative of the hon. minister, and I'll have him respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As everyone in this Assembly knows, there was a discussion held last Thursday about gay foster parenting specifically. What then occurred was that the Premier and this government decided that it would do what was in the best interests of the child when it came to same-sex foster couples.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to operationalize this decision, I basically said that the . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Micromanager.

DR. OBERG: Micromanager? Mr. Speaker, I am the one in charge of this department. I am the one who is accountable in this department. I now know why there was a deficit. Because this hon. member would not take a stand when she was minister in the past government.

What is going to happen is a frontline social worker in conjunction with the director of child welfare will make a decision about same-sex foster parents. They will put a child in a same-sex home if they feel that it is in the best interests of the child. Mr. Speaker, what I have then asked for, after that decision has been made, is the rationale they used in the best interests of the child to be sent to my deputy minister within five days.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition obviously doesn't like it when a minister becomes accountable, but this minister is accountable for what happens in his department.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would put it to the hon. member who asked the question: will she state in a press release definitively how she would handle the issue? Would she *carte blanche* allow same-sex couples to adopt? You know, I put that to her succinctly and directly: will she do that in a press release following question period and let it be known to all the media and through the media to the public. Will she do that?

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fairly and equitably is how I would govern my department, Mr. Premier.

How are the department's policies equitably applied when the minister chooses to impose his own beliefs on certain policy decisions?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister is doing what is absolutely right in the best interests of the child, but I would like to know from this hon. member the party's stance on this particular situation. Make a very definitive, straightforward, honest, transparent, open statement. What is her position?

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fairness and equity is my position.

I would ask: what is guiding the decisions in Family and Social Services? Personal and political biases or the best interests of children?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the answer is the best interests of the child, but again I ask the question – and I don't think we're going to get an answer. What is this member's position? Does she believe that foster children should be placed *carte blanche* without any input from the minister in the hands of same-sex couples? If she does, state it.

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

Health Legislation Review

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, the contentious Bill 37 would have allowed for private, for-profit hospitals, and fortunately there was enough public outcry to force the government to not proceed. I currently have a bill in front of the Legislature that would prohibit private, for-profit hospitals. Now knowing that the Health minister is in possession of his blue-ribbon panel report on Bill 37, I'd like to ask the Health minister if the reason he is sitting on this instead of

making it public now – remember, it was paid for by the taxpayers – is because he wants to put his spin doctors to work on this bill to exercise damage control.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is quite correct that I do have the report, and I do want to have time to read it carefully and to look at its implications. We are dealing here with a very, very important matter.

Mr. Speaker, the report will be made public. There certainly was never any intention to do otherwise, and I would hope that that could occur by the end of March.

MS BARRETT: The end of March? The man's a slow reader, Mr. Speaker.

Let me ask the Premier then. Will the Premier demand that his Health minister release this document no later than tomorrow? How long does one need to read it, for heaven's sake?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I haven't received it. You know, I have the same information as the hon. leader of the New Democrats, that the report is out. The minister has not even shared it with me, and that's the truth. I have not seen the report, but if the blue-ribbon panel comes in with recommendations for legislation that protects the public health system within the parameters of the Canada Health Act, then it's okay with me.

2:00

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's cut this issue to a black and white one. Will the Premier, then, ask his government member, who has used a very clever but not very useful parliamentary technique to kill my medicare protection act, to withdraw that amendment so public debate on private, for-profit hospitals can continue at least until we get the report?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, relative to the legislation that is now before the House and introduced by the New Democrats, I will ask the minister to take that legislation into consideration as we finalize the legislation relative to the son, I guess, of Bill 37 that will be introduced.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

School Accommodation Planning

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary board of education has just completed a series of public meetings with local residents on the future of schools in the city of Calgary as part of the LEAP report, or learning environment action plan. The LEAP report will outline the Calgary board of education recommendations on how to proceed on school facilities and student accommodation for the future. My question is to the hon. Minister of Education. Does the minister support this initiative undertaken by the Calgary board of education?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, at the outset I'd like to say that I commend the Calgary board of education for undertaking this consultation process, because for many years I don't think that this type of process has been part of their practice. It shows also a commitment that the board has to long-term planning with respect to the school facilities in the city of Calgary and their desire to work with parents to come up with a local solution for issues as they relate to facilities.

School boards may have many reasons why they need to close a

facility. It might be because of declining enrollments, or it might be simply because their schools are located in places where students are not. So under the closure of school regulations, school boards now have the authority to determine their school closure process.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that this LEAP process that the board has undertaken is one of the very positive things that was precipitated from the review of the operations of the Calgary board of education, which is what it was intended to do. It was not intended to find fault but, in fact, to find areas where the board and the province can both improve.

Mr. Speaker, I anticipate that the LEAP report will provide very good information for the Calgary board to use in making its very difficult decisions with respect to spaces and places for students.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: if the parents and community groups come up with solutions that would keep these schools open, what does this mean for the Calgary board of education?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think what this process will do is help provide information to the board to come up with a plan for dealing with the accommodation needs for students throughout the city. The purpose of that accommodation plan should be to try and improve the overall utilization rate of school facilities in the city of Calgary. There are a number of things that I think have been identified already through this process. As an example, the school board can lease school facilities that are underutilized to appropriate local community groups, not-for-profits, government departments, or perhaps even charter schools.

Just by way of example of things that I believe demonstrate that there's reason to be encouraged about what's going on with the Calgary board is the Victoria Park community school. Mr. Speaker, that school has been leased to a charter school, the local food bank is located there, a Japanese school, and a school board for continuing education. So the benefits of utilizing that space will accrue to the school board. As their utilization rate goes up, there will be a greater ability to justify the building of new facilities in places where students are actually located, such as in the high-growth suburban areas of the city of Calgary.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister of Education explain what the financial impacts might be if a local school board closes one of its schools?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it is very difficult to state all of the financial impacts that there would be from a school closure. One can only assume, however, that the school board would take those matters into account in taking the steps towards the decision to close a local facility.

Mr. Speaker, an accommodation plan could propose the closure of one facility and consolidation in another facility and accommodate the students in that way. As I indicated, the leasing of space is one of the options. Of course the school board has the positive financial impact of having those lease dollars available for the improvement or the maintenance of a particular facility. Also, if a board chooses to sell a facility at market value, the dollars from the provincial share of the building sale would be put aside for future capital projects. So these are all options that I think will come out of that particular report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary regional health authority provides services to 800,000 Albertans. It spends almost a billion tax dollars. The board of the CRHA just days ago received the internal administrative review report. We've seen in recent days the departure of Mr. John King, the head of acute care services and today the sudden cancellation of the Monday meeting of the board of the Calgary regional health authority. It's been moved in camera suddenly. My question to the Minister of Health: just what is going on in the Calgary region? Why has the public meeting been canceled?

MR. JONSON: It is my understanding, Mr. Speaker, that there is a meeting on Monday that was scheduled. It was to be their regular board meeting. It's my understanding that on Monday they are meeting with respect to this overall administration review that's been undertaken in Calgary. That's a decision that the board has made.

MR. DICKSON: Since there's only one person in this province who's been elected with the responsibility for health care, I want to go back to the Minister of Health and ask him: is the Calgary regional health authority doing something the Minister of Health doesn't like? Are they standing up for Calgarian's health needs against the wishes of the government? What's going on here, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all we must remember that the Calgary regional health authority board commissioned a review of their overall administrative structure and function. I regard that quite frankly as being a constructive move on their part with respect to looking to improvements, to resetting their direction, setting their plans. They are, as I understand it, now in receipt of the report. I also think it is quite understandable that they would want to have a meeting to concentrate on and to receive that report. The board is, I think, fulfilling their responsibility with respect to this particular process that they're engaged in.

MR. DICKSON: My final question, then, is going to the Premier. Since he told us just on March 15, 1999, that "this is an open, transparent government," I'd say to the Premier: how does he plan on restoring public confidence in his unelected, appointed regional health authority board in the city of Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Well, with respect to unelected, appointed, Mr. Speaker, we have made a commitment that, in fact, this will happen in conjunction with the next civic elections.

Mr. Speaker, I'll remind the hon. member that before this government took over, there were something like 200 individual hospital boards. I think about two or three were elected. I was on one of those boards for nine years. I was ex officio on that board by virtue of being the mayor, but all the members were appointed. District 93: they were all appointed. Carewest, the Foothills board, the Children's board: all appointed. All those separate boards. Now at least we've got 17. This was an undertaking that this government took as a result of The Rainbow Report, which the minister of the day didn't carry out. We had to do it. It was very, very difficult. They will be elected. [interjection] Well, I'm going to re-write that speech. As a matter of fact I'll send the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition the video tape.

The Rainbow Report recommended nine regions and elected, and we agreed to that. We agreed to that, but some of the board said that they were not ready, so we delayed that process to the next civic elections.

2:10

Relative to the Calgary regional health authority if the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has some input and some positive thoughts or ideas or insights into what is happening there, please share it with me. Please share it with me. It's going to be a difficult situation, especially for Calgary-Buffalo. It's going to be a very difficult one for Calgary-Buffalo, and I would ask the hon. member to share with me any insight he has relative to the situation respecting the CRHA. Can I have that undertaking?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Graduating Teachers

MR. HIERATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of the public-sector unions are in the midst of negotiating wage and benefit agreements. Also, in the next month or so our universities will be graduating a new class of qualified teachers. Some of my constituents are uncertain whether the goal of government is to have lower numbers of students per classroom, higher wage scales for teachers, or performance measure payments for teachers. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. What is the number of education graduates from Alberta education institutes this spring?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, it certainly is convocation time, and all of the institutions are, of course, preparing for these festivities. I think I can provide the member with an approximate number. He's asking about graduating teachers, as I understood the question, although sometimes I get a certain feeling in this ear that might be affecting my hearing.

The universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge all provide education degree programs. By the way, the members might be interested that Concordia University College of Alberta and The King's University College also provide after-degree programs in education. I would think, Mr. Speaker, that this year in Alberta we'll be graduating approximately 1,500 bright, capable, new, enthusiastic teachers.

MR. HIERATH: To the same minister: what kind of job placement opportunities do the new teachers have in the province?

MR. DUNFORD: Actually I think that in the context of the national scene this graduating class of I'm saying approximately 1,500 are going to find some excellent opportunities. According to the information that I have, about 75 percent of this graduating class are going to find employment in their field. So this leaves, I suppose, 350 to 400 teachers that might be waiting until some of the retirements take place.

It reminds us that we must strive for better labour market information. Because we're in an age of technology, wouldn't it be nice if we could simply go to a web site and have all of this information that would come for us? I guess we'd have to remember, Mr. Speaker, that probably that would have to come from advertisements, and I'm sure that as Mary Balsillie, Bruce Collingwood, and Terry Kirkland have found out, 80 percent of the jobs are never advertised.

MR. HIERATH: My final question is to the Minister of Education. Average weekly earnings compiled by Stats Canada are running at about a 2.3 percent increase per year. How can the minister justify increases higher than that when there is clearly a surplus of teachers?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to say with all due respect to my colleague that teaching is not about supply and demand. A well-balanced workforce in any large organization requires a balance of new and experienced staff, and that balance must be a key objective of any human resource strategy that a school board has anywhere in the province.

I need to remind this Assembly that school boards often ask us for dollars that have no strings attached to them, and for the most part I agree, and for the most part this is what we in fact do. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, individual school boards must be accountable to taxpayers for the wages that they choose to pay to their staff through the collective bargaining process.

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

Tourism Marketing

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a series of questions from March 10 the Premier said that Alberta's Asia Pacific tourism receipts were down because of the Asian flu and that this drop was a North America phenomenon, but the government's own strategic tourism marketing plan reports, "Clearly, Alberta lost market share, and other provinces gained during this period."

My questions are to the minister responsible for tourism. Why did Alberta's Asia Pacific tourism revenues fall by 25 percent in 1997 when revenues from this same market were up 16 percent in Ontario and up 29 percent in Atlantic Canada?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, last year, particularly in our peak area time frame, our tourism experienced an increase of roughly 17 to 19 percent overall to the province of Alberta, albeit the vast majority of the tourists that came to Alberta were from the United States. The marketing program that was put in place on the resident and international campaign attracted a lot of people from Stateside. You know, let's not fool anybody. There was a low Canadian dollar. So that, I believe, contributed to the vast majority of the tourism trade that came to Canada, period, because a lot of it was coming in with U.S. dollars.

Our shift in some of our market attraction has moved from particularly the Japanese market, but our Korea tourism clientele are still coming to Alberta. In fact, when we were on our recent trip to Korea, Alberta, not Canada but Alberta, was selected to be profiled at the Kangwon-do World Tourism Exposition this year because of the relationship, the tourism trade between Korea and Alberta. So we're seeing a real turnaround in the profiling of Alberta in the Asian market, albeit not in certain sectors of the Asian market, but at the world expo this fall Alberta, not Canada, is being profiled. I think that's a tremendous honour for our Alberta tourism industry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what percent of Alberta's 25 percent drop in Asia Pacific revenues can be directly attributed to the mismanagement of foreign marketing by this government and its agent the Alberta Tourism Partnership?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I think you can go back and try and pinpoint a lot of reasons why. When you're doing an international marketing program, you have to focus on markets throughout the world. Some markets shift, and clearly we saw that shift occur. Under our new strategic marketing plan and the industry working directly with our ministry and other departments of government, we are focusing on a very intensive international campaign which will include not only Asia but Europe and other parts of the world.

We will continue, however, to focus a lot of our attention on the United States because they still are our biggest customers. I think it's important not to lose sight of that. United States traffic to Alberta is very important.

The other thing that I think is very important is that through the new strategic marketing council and the process, the industry themselves are working to determine the type of international representation. The hon. member is quite right. When I took this portfolio and met some of our international reps, I was quite upset quite frankly that a lot of them had never even been to the province of Alberta. That has changed, so this new framework should do a better job, and I'm confident it will, because we have people who know about Alberta out there promoting Alberta.

2:20

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that this government is again contracting out large portions of its tourism responsibilities, what safeguards will be in place this time to ensure that Alberta's fourth largest industry is not further jeopardized by a repeat of the Alberta tourism partnership fiasco?

MRS. NELSON: I think, Mr. Speaker, that one of the best safeguards we have is with the strategic marketing council. The industry, working with government, not in isolation, will be working to put forward and have put forward a strategic marketing plan for Alberta. In addition to that, we have contracted out some of the elements of tourism promotion: the resident campaign and the international campaign. This is not going all into one pot this time. This is going out into different areas and has been RFP'd out. The marketing council, I have to say, haven't come to me with their recommendation for the awarding of the contract, but I expect that to come forward very soon.

I think some of the things that are very key, though, Mr. Speaker, are that with the restructuring of the tourism destination regions and the play of their marketing plans moving into the overall strategic marketing plan for the province, we have taken the emphasis and put it back into the communities to profile their own communities. In fact, the hon. minister of children's services and I met this morning with a group from the north to see how we could profile aboriginal tourism programs within the strategic marketing plan, which had never happened before quite frankly. They'd been left out.

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

Highway 13

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The diversification and increased traffic that is resulting from a stepped-up economy is in many cases a good problem to have. But when you put that with the rationalization of our rail and elevator systems, you get problems; in this case, highway 13 east of Camrose, where two new inland grain terminals and other industrial activity are increasing the traffic on this highway. Can the Minister of Transportation and Utilities advise what work is being done and what work is planned to be done on this already designated primary highway.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, earlier today the chair allowed two questions to proceed. He allowed the leader of the ND opposition to raise a question with respect to a piece of legislation that is, in fact, scheduled for discussion later today, and then he also allowed the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner to proceed with a question

to a minister whose estimates are in subcommittee tonight. Now, there's enough fairness with respect to that. In fact, the Minister of Transportation and Utilities also has his estimates in subcommittee tonight, so we are going to move on to Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by St. Albert.

Northern Regional Health Study

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The final report of the northern river basins human health monitoring program is being released tomorrow. The program's mandate was to investigate, understand, and characterize the links between environmental factors and human health in northern Alberta. At least one member of the management committee has written a dissenting statement as the report does not meet the program's stated mandate. My questions are to the Minister of Health. Is the fact that there were dissenting views the reason that the management committee was not asked to sign off on the document?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I can certainly understand that previously in question period today a member from across the way raised the question of when a particular report would be released that I do have in my possession. In this particular case, in the question itself it is acknowledged that the report has not been released. It is not public. It has not been distributed. So I find it very difficult to respond to a document and a sequence of events that I'm not aware of.

MS LEIBOVICI: As the minister was invited to attend the giving of the report tomorrow in Fort McMurray and as the committee reports directly or indirectly to the minister, can the minister tell us: why wasn't the scientific advisory committee consulted on an ongoing basis throughout this three-year process?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, I am quite prepared to look into the matter. This is a very important report, I agree, a very important activity that has been going on for some time, and certainly I have an interest, a responsibility with respect to this overall area. But the fact remains that I do not have this particular report. Therefore, I have not had a chance to go through it or be briefed on its contents or deal with any contentions or allegations that the process may not have been what some people expected.

MS LEIBOVICI: Given that the report is the result of five drafts and that throughout each one of those drafts there have been indications that the report is not adequate, will the minister make the commitment to a new study under a new director that will tell people in that region whether in fact the air and water are affecting their health? That's what they want to know, Mr. Minister.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it seems to be lost on the hon. member across the way but I hope other members of the Assembly will realize that it is impossible to answer that type of question without having seen the report, studied the report, looked at its implications, looked at any difficulties that may have been alleged in the process that was followed, and then assess the situation and respond.

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

Supreme Court Decision on Probate Fees

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Supreme Court ruled that Ontario's probate fees were illegal because they

were a tax rather than a fee. The court gave Ontario six months – that is, until late April – to review its system and take action. Now, that ruling has an impact apparently on all provinces, including Alberta. So my question is to the Provincial Treasurer. What are we doing in Alberta with regard to this Supreme Court decision?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, though I always feel a little bit uncomfortable when the courts are giving direction to Legislatures, the Supreme Court ruling is going to involve a good exercise. The court basically said that if government has a fee or a charge and that fee or charge takes in a certain amount of money that seems to go far beyond the actual cost of delivering that service, then the Legislature concerned would have to actually bring that amount in fact into the Assembly before the Legislature and probably refer to it as a tax. So you can charge whatever you want in a way, but you must be up front about whether it's just cost recovery or whether it's in excess of that.

All ministers are in the process of reviewing fees, and in fact most departments I think have already sent in for consideration the full number of fees that are charged within their particular portfolio. We'll now have to reassess and look at those. It's going to take some time, but we want to look at those and see which are true cost recovery and which in fact might be beyond cost recovery.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Provincial Treasurer as well. Are you looking at proposing legislation with respect to this fee?

MR. DAY: Well, that's a key consideration right now, Mr. Speaker. The possibility of legislation is there, and for this reason. Because of the court ruling, other provinces have already brought in legislation. The province of Ontario brought in legislation on the matter of probate fees that basically allows them to keep those fees where they are. As a matter of fact, they made it retroactive all the way back to 1951, because the effect of not protecting that by legislation would have had a huge impact on the revenues if they had to pay that out for the last 40 years or more. So theirs goes back quite a ways. Other provinces are bringing forward a number of their fees and protecting them by legislation.

2:30

We're looking at that possibility. Do we need to do that? If we run the risk of somebody filing or contesting a fee that they're paying while we're still in the review process, that could create some difficulties. We want to do a legitimate review, but we could be impacted by people who might in fact say that the fee is not legitimate. We're looking at what other provinces have done. We're going to see what works for Alberta, and we'll see if in fact we need legislation.

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Provincial Treasurer: with respect to the review that you've mentioned, how long do you think this is going to take?

MR. DAY: Well, we want to have it completed as soon as possible. There are possibly up to 800 different fees that are being charged at this particular time. The Supreme Court ruling would seem to suggest that Ontario had up until about the middle of April to have something in place, either legislation or a full explanation of every fee. We're looking at that. That could mean that as early as April somebody could be taking us to court because of a particular fee.

So if we were going to bring in legislation, I think it could take anywhere from eight to 12 months to complete the review. To

protect our fees, to keep them in place, we might want some legislation that would cover that period of time, just to allow us to do the review and something that would prohibit us from increasing fees – we don't want to do that as we're doing this review – maybe even reduce fees. I think one of the positive things about this court case is that it forces governments to review their fee structure and possibly lower them.

So in terms of time I don't know that we've got a lot of time before we could be charged. We may have to look at some legislation with a very narrow sunset clause on it, maybe eight months, maybe 12 months, to allow us to get this review done, and I would hope that opposition members would take part with us in the review of the fees and give us their reflections on those also.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call on the first of seven members to participate in Recognitions today. Prior to introducing the first of our seven speakers under Recognitions, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

head: Introduction of Guests
(*reversion*)

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me today to introduce 140 students from Olds junior/ senior high school. Part of the reason for their enthusiasm is increased funding announced in Budget '99. Accompanying them today are teachers Ms Gayleen Roelfsema, Mr. Kelvin Beaudry, Mr. Terry Miller, Mr. Robert Worsfold, Mrs. Deb Doetzall, Mr. Garry Woodruff, along with parents Mrs. Kathy Doyle, Mrs. Heather De Boer, Mrs. Carrie Richardson, Mrs. Carolyn Tschoumy, Mrs. Audrey McKenzie, Mrs. Jan Turnbull, Mrs. Jennifer Shields, Mrs. Gordon Leask, and Mr. Gordon Thompson. I would ask that they all rise and accept the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: To all of our visitors from Olds, it's not often that the Assembly in fact has visitors from Olds.

As one of the aspects of the routine of the session, the Alberta Legislative Assembly has been offering twice a week, once on Monday and once on Wednesday, to have a number of hon. members stand up and give a one-minute discourse or recognition on behalf of either a constituent or some individual or some project in the province of Alberta that they feel very, very proud of. Today there'll be seven members, and we'll begin first of all with the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

National Women's Basketball Championship

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I rise today to recognize the efforts of the SAIT Trojan women's basketball team. The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology happens to be in the constituency of Calgary-Mountain View, and I'm very proud to have that there.

The new Canadian Colleges Athletic Association national champions, this team put on a superb display of teamwork and sportsmanship throughout the women's national championship tournament at Medicine Hat College this past weekend. The team finished the tournament with a convincing 90 to 75 victory over College Montmorency in the gold medal game.

The national title wraps up a very successful year for the SAIT Trojan women. They have dominated the Canadian college circuit, and their hard work and dedication to excellence throughout the year has earned them the right to call themselves national champs. I'm also proud to note that all but two players on the team's roster are homegrown Albertans.

I encourage all members of this Assembly to congratulate this talented team for its exciting victory at the national championships and on a very successful season of college basketball.

Bridge Foundation

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge and recognize the work of the Bridge Foundation in the city of Calgary. The Bridge Foundation held their annual fund-raising dinner last Friday with 600 supporters in attendance.

The Bridge Foundation was initially created by Calgary pediatrician Dr. John Wu, who identified a huge need in the community to address the challenges faced by immigrant youth new to the city of Calgary. Executive director Harry Yee and board chairman Gail Kingwell have overseen an expansion of programs into a number of junior high schools in both the Calgary public and separate systems.

Each year, as happened again last Friday, three youths speak about the challenges they face coming to a new country, a new culture, new language, the loneliness, the frustration, the isolation they feel, and they spoke eloquently about the support they received through the Bridge homework club and a range of other programs.

I just want to salute the work done not only by Harry and all his staff but the volunteers, the people on the board of the foundation, and the huge support they receive from Calgarians.

Thank you very much.

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

Edmonton Ambassador Awards

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday at Economic Development Edmonton's annual luncheon the Edmonton ambassador awards were presented. The awards are appropriately named, as each recipient has proven to be an outstanding ambassador to that city.

The ambassador award of excellence presentations were made to Telus Corporation, the 2001 world triathlon bid committee, and the 2001 world championships in athletics bid committee. The outstanding ambassador award was presented to Jim Hole, chair of the 37-member Oilers Investment Group.

Special ambassador awards were presented to the following: Andrew Clark, principal of Clark Builders; Dr. Fahar Merchant, president of Intelligene Expressions, Inc.; Les Young, for his work with the 1998 Association of Science and Technologies Centres Conference; Krishan Joshee and Stan Fisher for their work as co-chairs of the 15th biennial World Volunteer Conference of the International Association of Volunteer Effort; Laurence Decore, former mayor of Edmonton and former Leader of the Opposition, and John McGee, founder of the Edmonton marathon and Edmonton Sports Festival.

Congratulations to all.

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

Christopher Lucas

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the pleasure

of attending the unveiling of a watercolour that was painted and donated by Christopher Lucas to Highlands junior high school. The picture depicts a winter scene of the historical school, which is located in the community of Highlands.

Christopher was a student of Highlands junior high. He is an inspirational role model not only to the students at Highlands but for all Alberta youth. His artwork hangs in the offices of the Prime Minister of Canada, the Governor General of Canada, many cabinet ministers, and of course in the homes of many Albertans. His artwork is also displayed by collectors in England, France, Germany, and Japan.

Christopher has allowed for money from the sale of the lithographed copies of the paintings to benefit the school directly. The gift will help offset the fund-raising needed for required materials such as computers.

On behalf of the Highlands parent council, the Highlands alumni, staff, teachers, and students, I would like to express our appreciation for Christopher's gift. He has shown great dedication to our school and to our community.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Wetaskiwin Credit Union

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend it was my privilege to attend the 60th anniversary of the Wetaskiwin Credit Union. The Wetaskiwin Credit Union received its charter one year after the Credit Union Act was passed, having been brought forward by E.C. Manning in 1938. Wetaskiwin was the 12th in the province to receive its charter and is one of only four that remain as original entities.

Born out of the theme of people helping each other that spread across North America during the Depression years, the Wetaskiwin Credit Union has flourished thanks to many dedicated citizens. Congratulations to their manager since 1971, Tom Lloyd, to president Randy Risto, and to the board of directors, past and present, for 60 years of service to their community. We salute the credit union for helping many people in this province through difficult times and commend their example to all of us of how people can work together to help each other.

Thank you.

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

2:40

Environmental Law Centre

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the Environmental Law Centre (Alberta) Society, located in this capital city. This nonprofit charitable organization has been providing Albertans with expert and objective information about environmental and natural resources law since 1982.

Its mandate is threefold: to serve as a resource to the public in general, to governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and to the media; to facilitate change by helping Albertans in the province understand the implications of government policies for environmental protection; and to seek reform of Alberta environmental protection policies through research. The centre does quality research and uses it to propose law reform in a constructive way.

The centre's work serves to clarify public debate and thus makes valuable contributions to the making of environmental decisions for our beautiful province. The Environmental Law Centre is a strong advocate for the environment, and its publicly-minded legal experts

work tremendously hard to use their knowledge of law and a positive vision to build a better future for all of us. I salute and thank them for their meritorious work.

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

Canada Winter Games

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to recognize four young athletes from my constituency of Calgary-West who returned home recently from the Canada Winter Games as proud medal winners in their events: Ryan Blais, Melissa Prefontaine, Blake Robson, and Rhonda Sandau.

Congratulations, Ryan, on winning the silver medal in men's aerials freestyle skiing in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Congratulations, Melissa, on your gold medal win in women's aerials freestyle skiing at the Canada Winter Games. Blake, my congratulations to you on winning the gold medal in men's hockey, and Rhonda, my congratulations to you on winning the gold medal in the women's four by five kilometre relay cross-country skiing event.

I encourage you to enjoy your accomplishments, to feel proud to be an Albertan. Your months and years of training and hard work in your sport have been rewarded with your Canada Games medal. On behalf of the government of Alberta and all Albertans I congratulate you, Ryan, Melissa, Blake, and Rhonda, on your special achievements.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNEN: 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 25, 28, 47, 49, 58, 59, 61, 62, 63, and 67.

[Motion carried]

Maintenance Enforcement Arrears

Q25. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.

How many maintenance enforcement accounts were in arrears or did not receive the full amount of court-ordered support at any point in time during the 1997-98 fiscal year?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move an amendment with respect to the question and then accept it if the amendment goes through. I'd like to strike out "at any point in time during the 1997-98 fiscal year?" and substitute "as at December 31, 1997?" So the question will read as follows:

How many maintenance enforcement accounts were in arrears or did not receive the full amount of court-ordered support as at December 31, 1997?

The reason we're suggesting this, Mr. Speaker, is in order to clarify at which point in time during fiscal '97-98 the information is required, and we've suggested the date of December 31, 1997.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: That's a reasonable amendment, and I'm willing to accept that.

[Motion as amended carried]

Maintenance Enforcement

Q28. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.

How many active files in the maintenance enforcement program relate to creditors or to debtors where the payee or payor is resident in a jurisdiction not named in the declaration of reciprocating states regulation?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I regret to advise the hon. member that I'm suggesting we reject this written question, the reason being that the maintenance enforcement program does enforce maintenance orders for nonresidents who live in nonreciprocating jurisdictions if the court orders were obtained in Alberta. We estimate that there are less than 200 or 300 of these cases out of an active caseload of over 42,000. Our computer system, however, is unable to confirm the count, and it would be very labour and time intensive if we did an address check in every jurisdiction with which we do not have a reciprocal agreement.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, my disappointment is palpable. I am disappointed, and I have questions for the minister in charge of the maintenance enforcement program. Are any upgrades being done to the computer system, then, if it's having such a struggle being able to sort and do queries on the different kinds of files that they have here? This question was asked because I'm finding I'm getting an increasing number of questions on creditors unable to get satisfaction when the debtor is not residing in a country where there is a reciprocal agreement in place.

The minister is aware of how passionate I feel about this program and how much I would like to help him improve this program. I think part of that improvement is indeed being able to assist as many different kinds of cases and as many cases as possible. We hear that there are perhaps 200 to 300 cases that would be as I have pointed out here. In other words, the debtor is residing in a country that's not covered by a reciprocal agreement. That's still 200 or 300 families, with who knows how many children in them, who are not going to be successful in getting assistance through the Alberta maintenance enforcement program to try and recover moneys in another country, province, or state. That costs all Alberta taxpayers and I think should be a worry to all of us.

I am very disappointed that the minister is not able to answer this question, and I certainly encourage him to take any possible action that he can with the department to be able to answer it a year from now. Hopefully we can improve the department to the point where indeed this is possible to answer and to track.

[Motion lost]

Employment and Training Initiatives

Q47. Mrs. Sloan moved that the following question be accepted. What statistics and standards were used to determine that 80 percent of participants in employment and training initia-

tives are either off welfare or working and receiving a supplement to their earnings as outlined in the 1997-98 Family and Social Services annual report?

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

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you. On behalf of the Minister of Family and Social Services and in the spirit of openness I'm pleased to accept this question on behalf of the government.

2:50

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My thanks to the Minister of Family and Social Services.

[Motion carried]

Maintenance Enforcement Program

Q49. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.

How many staff positions were vacant on the 1st and 15th of each month in the offices of the maintenance enforcement program in the period January 1, 1996, to February 16, 1999?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move an amendment, and it would be as follows: by striking out "on the 1st and 15th day of each month" and also striking out "in the period January 1, 1996, to February 16, 1999?" and substituting "on a quarterly basis for the period December 31, 1995, to February 28, 1999?" So the question as amended will read:

How many staff positions were vacant in the offices of the maintenance enforcement program on a quarterly basis for the period December 31, 1995, to February 28, 1999?

The reason for the amendment, Mr. Speaker, is that the maintenance enforcement program keeps staff vacancy statistics as of the last day of each month, not midmonth, and also quite frankly we feel it may be more meaningful for the member if we provide the figures on a quarterly basis.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would accept that amendment. I understand what the minister and the department staff are trying to do there. I think the point is that it's an arbitrary date in time when it's chosen, and therefore the figures can't be chosen to suit the particular date. They are what they are, and that makes for better analysis for all of us. That's what we're trying to do, to improve this program. So I am willing to accept that amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion as amended carried]

Citizens' Appeal Panel

Q58. Mrs. Sloan moved that the following question be accepted. What are the reasons for appeal and breakdown of decisions reached in the 485 appeals heard by the child welfare citizens' appeal panel during the 1997-98 fiscal year?

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

DR. TAYLOR: Yes. I've managed to convince the hon. minister to accept this one as well.

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

MRS. SLOAN: If I didn't know better, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that perhaps the hon. minister of science and technology is negotiating a career change to Family and Social Services. I am pleased to accept the minister's acknowledgment of this.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Child Welfare Caseload

Q59. Mrs. Sloan moved that the following question be accepted. What investigations have been completed or are presently being undertaken to determine the reasons for the increase in the child welfare caseload from 7,605 in 1993-94 to 11,258 in 1997-98?

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

DR. TAYLOR: Well, Mr. Speaker, in spite of my efforts to convince the minister opposite, he has also agreed to accept this question.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and acknowledgments to the minister for his acceptance.

[Motion carried]

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

Q61. Mrs. Sloan moved that the following question be accepted. What is the definition of priority placement for pregnant women who are at an increased risk of having a fetal alcohol syndrome child?

DR. TAYLOR: Once again I'm pleased to accept this exciting question on behalf of the Minister of Family and Social Services.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is particularly a pleasure, given the fact that this information has been previously sought in correspondence, given the fact that it is now an item on the Order Paper, that the minister has seen fit to provide the information to the Assembly and to this member.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Judicial Compensation Commission

Q62. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. What expenditures were made to the members of and on

behalf of the Judicial Compensation Commission in the period January 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move the following amendment and then move acceptance: adding "aggregate" before "expenditures."

MRS. SLOAN: Oh, you're just being picky.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, it was going so well, Mr. Speaker.

Then also striking out "the members of and on behalf of" and substituting "and on behalf of the members of." So the question as amended will now read:

What aggregate expenditures were made to and on behalf of the members of the Judicial Compensation Commission in the period January 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999?

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the question in its current format is somewhat ambiguous as it does not specify whether information is requested in the aggregate or individually for each member of the Judicial Compensation Commission. In addition, I have been advised that third-party consent for individual disclosure of this information would be required pursuant to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

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

MS OLSEN: On the amendment. Well, I understand that the minister usually likes things in bulk. I'm disappointed that he will not release the individual expenditures. However, we will accept the amendment as it stands.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MS OLSEN: Just thank you to the minister for being so kind as to provide us with the information that we requested.

[Motion as amended carried]

Herb Jamieson/Hope Mission

Q63. Mrs. Sloan moved that the following question be accepted. What are the medical protocols at the Herb Jamieson/Hope Mission single men's hostel?

DR. TAYLOR: It is with a heavy heart that I accept this question as well, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We requested this information initially over four months ago from the minister's office, and it's refreshing this afternoon that the hon. minister of science, research, and technology has been able to convince the minister to provide that information.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

3:00 Workers' Compensation Board Claims

Q67. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.

On the 1st and 15th of each month in the period January 1, 1996, to February 16, 1999, how many individuals occupying permanent or contract positions were on long-term disability or absent due to a Workers' Compensation Board claim in the offices of the maintenance enforcement program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with what I've done previously, I'm going to have to amend this a little bit, but hopefully the member will find it to be acceptable. I would like to strike out "on the 1st and 15th of each month" and substitute "at the end of each month," strike out "long-term" and "or absent." So the question as amended will read:

At the end of each month in the period January 1, 1996, to February 16, 1999, how many individuals occupying permanent or contract positions were on disability due to a Workers' Compensation Board claim in the offices of the maintenance enforcement program?

As I indicated earlier, Mr. Speaker, the program keeps staff vacancy statistics as of the last day of each month, not midmonth. Also, the question in its current form was somewhat unclear as to what information was required. Did the Member for Edmonton-Centre require information on the number of individuals on long-term disability as well as the number of individuals absent due to a Workers' Compensation Board claim or information on the number of individuals that were absent from work on a long-term disability due to a WCB claim? Because of the confusion we have amended the question to provide information on the number of individuals on disability due to a WCB claim.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on the amendment to say that though it's appreciated that we are getting some information with regard to the number of individuals occupying permanent or contract positions who are on disability due to a Workers' Compensation Board claim, it would've been even more appreciated had we had the full information that was requested by the Member for Edmonton-Centre; in other words, to be able to find out those individuals who are off on a WCB claim due to a long-term disability or absent due to a claim in the offices of the maintenance enforcement program. So though the amendment is acknowledged and appreciated, the original request for information would've been even more appreciated.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the amendment. Well, yes, I'm disappointed, but I hope this is because the minister and departmental staff are trying to be accommodating. I was looking for the individuals who were essentially on a stress leave or on a disability leave. [interjections] I'm not sure why the Minister of Labour is involved in this conversation. I'll continue on. I'm sure he's got time to join the debate if he's truly interested.

What I was seeking was those who were away due to a stress leave or some sort of malady that had been caused by the job. In the

amendment what we get now is anybody that was off on a workers' compensation claim. That could include a repetitive stress syndrome injury or just about anything. So it makes it harder for me to distinguish why we have different staff in the maintenance enforcement program that are off and what the reasons are that they're off on a workers' compensation claim. [interjection] It's in the letter. Yes. Okay. Good. Perhaps it's possible that the minister is going to try and help me out here by distinguishing the different types of reasons that people are off on workers' compensation. As I say, I wish that we didn't have to have this amendment, but hopefully it's being done in the best possible spirit.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion as amended 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 appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 9, 10, 14, 16, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 60, 64, 65, 66, 76, 107, 108, 109, and 111. I thought I could get it all in one breath, but there are just too many.

[Motion carried]

RHA Deficit Elimination Plans

M9. Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all deficit elimination plans submitted by regional health authorities between April 1, 1998, and February 17, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we're going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The Order Paper has an error in it. It refers to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre rather than the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, and according to our clock there remain 18 minutes of a maximum 20 minutes speaking time.

MS LEIBOVICI: And this is on Motion for a Return 9, Mr. Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: The one that's been called, hon. member.

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay.

MR. WICKMAN: I thought Halvar accepted this one. No?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has the floor.

MS LEIBOVICI: I believe the Minister of Health had not accepted this particular motion.

The reason for this particular motion for a return is very simple, Mr. Speaker. The reason is the fact that we know that over the last number of years there have been difficulties in each and every regional health authority across this province. We know that regional health authorities are required to provide budget plans, to provide strategic plans, to provide an overview of what their operations are to the Minister of Health. We also are aware that the minister has made it very clear that any regional health authorities

that are looking at, projecting, or recognizing that they may in fact have a deficit will be required to provide to the minister that information as well as the plan that indicates how they will address the deficit within their particular region.

When we are looking at deficit elimination plans, we know that those occur because in fact there's not enough in the budget to provide for all of the services that a particular regional health authority would like to provide to its residents within that particular region. In asking for the information, what we are looking for is: what are the priorities within the different regions for different services, and what are the actual action plans that the regions are going to have to undertake in order to provide the services in health care that are required by each and every regional health authority to provide?

Now, when we see deficit elimination plans, it would be interesting to know which facilities may not receive renovations, which facilities might not receive the upgrades that are required, which pieces of equipment may have to last that extra year or two before they are replaced or upgraded as well, which facilities may in fact be closed and the impact that has on individuals who are currently utilizing those facilities. I can think of a very recent example up in the Lakeland region, where it is being looked at very seriously to close the third floor of St. Joe's in Vegreville. The implications of moving out 15 individuals who depend on that particular facility for long-term care have a huge impact not only on themselves but their families and the community at large.

So it would be a public service that the minister would provide in indicating and having submitted to this Legislative Assembly the deficit elimination plans that have been submitted to him by the regional health authorities so that if in fact communities want to look at those plans – because those plans should not be secret; regional health authorities are funded by taxpayer dollars – if communities wish to look at what the impact of those plans are on their particular communities, they can. They can then provide I'm sure valuable insight and information to the regional health authority and to the minister as to how perhaps budgets can be addressed that may have plans within them for deficit elimination.

3:10

Now, the minister may well say that given the dollars that have been provided in the health care budget this year and projected for the next two years, his information is that there will be no deficits and therefore there is no need for a deficit elimination plan by the regional health authorities. We all know, however, that unfortunately that is not the case. There are regions such as WestView that are predicting a deficit situation, and the Calgary regional health authority is also predicting that they may well be in a deficit as well. Those are at least two we know of that have indicated to this point in time that that could well occur.

The idea behind this particular motion for a return was to ensure that there is the openness and transparency in the government that we have all been led to believe is the position of this particular government, to ensure that there is a flow of communications that occurs between the minister and the Legislative Assembly, between the citizens of this province, and between the regional health authorities. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we just heard on the weekend that one of the greatest concerns that was put forward in a meeting that was attended by the minister and the regional health authorities and other providers was the lack of communication that occurs. So this would be one way to ensure that everyone has the same basic information.

In understanding what the direction is of the Department of Health, in understanding what the direction is of this particular

government, it is of extreme importance that we are all on a level playing field when it comes to information. The request, therefore, for the deficit elimination plans should not be one to be seen as threatening, should not be one to be seen in any light other than a positive light. That positive light is the provision of information, the provision of sharing, openness, and transparency, ensuring that there is ability for input on the part of all who would be concerned and interested in the deficit elimination plans in their particular regional health authority.

What I would imagine we would see within those deficit elimination plans are, as I indicated earlier, where some potential closures might be, where some changes would be in operations within the regional health authorities, where there may be a different emphasis on priorities, whether those emphases are movement from acute care provision of services to community health services. We would also perhaps see what the staffing ratios might be and how they might change and how that in fact would affect patient care as well.

This request was put forward in good faith. I am surprised, unless the minister has changed his mind from last week to this week in denying this particular request, in that the request is not one that I believe would lead anyone to fear with regards to that information being made public. In fact, the deficit elimination plans should be made public. They should be part of the business plans that are put forward by the regional health authorities and perhaps should even be part of the public process with regards to the open meetings that regional health authorities have across this province.

If I may provide a suggestion to the minister – and if it is already occurring, I would appreciate that information as well. With the community health councils that are mandated by legislation through this Legislative Assembly to be that link between the communities and the regional health authorities, perhaps before deficit elimination plans are provided to the minister by the regional health authorities those plans should be provided to the community health councils so that that communication process that seems to be of concern to the government and in fact individuals who feel they are in the dark with regards to the services that are provided by their regional health authorities – this could be part and parcel of ensuring that full information is provided to everyone within a particular region.

So the request seems to be reasonable. The request seems to be one that would provide a public service in terms of providing information. It is because of the taxpayers' dollars that are collected by this government that in fact we have a budget in Health and that in fact we have regional health authorities set up to dispense those hard-earned dollars. If there is an issue with regards to how services are delivered, whether it is a service delivery model that's put forward through the strategic plans and the operational plans that are provided to the minister or whether it is through the deficit elimination plans that are also provided to the minister, it only seems reasonable that that information should in fact be made public.

As I indicated, I would hope that the minister would in fact reconsider his proposal, and perhaps he has. If there is a concern – and I think I may have addressed this last week, but just in case I haven't, Mr. Speaker, I will bring it up at this point. If there is a concern that perhaps the deficit elimination plans are dated because of the new budget, we are always ready, willing, and able to look at amendments that the minister could bring forward with regards to any of the motions we have put forward. We saw just earlier an example in Written Questions, where in the spirit of co-operation there were some amendments brought forward by the Minister of Justice that were acceptable to the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

If the Minister of Health were to follow the example of the Minister of Justice in that spirit of co-operation, it would be

acceptable to this member. Perhaps I am speaking out of turn in that I have not discussed this with my caucus, Mr. Speaker, but it would be acceptable to this member to have provided to the Legislative Assembly the deficit elimination plans that will be provided to the minister as a result of the new budget that has been put forward. So if the dates are what the issue is, I'm sure that we can work on some kind of a compromise to ensure that the information is available, that the openness and transparency the government prides itself on is carried through in the spirit of this particular motion.

If I may, I'd request that the minister look at that particular suggestion and also that he consider and look at the suggestion that was made with regards to the deficit elimination plans being part of the communications package that our regional health authorities and the community health councils have when they go to consult with the community on the services that are provided within the region. That is part and parcel of a system of accountability and one of the measures, perhaps, that can be used in that system of accountability that is put forward by the government.

3:20

I would hope, in order that next year we do not see the same motion for a return on the Order Paper, that perhaps the minister would table in the Legislative Assembly the deficit elimination plans as he receives them so that they are public and they are available to the public for consideration and for review, and I would hope that the deficit elimination plans are also perhaps part of the budget documents that we receive as an appendix to the Minister of Health's budget. That might be one way we could avoid having the large number of returns that we have on the Order Paper. The reason that we have these motions for returns is that we have been unable to access this information in any other way, Mr. Speaker, and again we are being stymied by the minister with regards to this very reasonable request.

So I would hope that the minister and his department will look at how we can ensure that that information is provided, and provided in a timely fashion as well, so that everyone knows what the situation is with regards to the regional health authorities in this province, with regards to their budgets, their priorities, and where in fact potential cuts would occur. It would help to alleviate in certain areas across this province a lot of the concern and fear I have encountered on a number of trips I have taken to visit with different communities across this province in my capacity as the Health critic.

I'm sure that the minister himself has on a number of occasions received these requests. What are the plans for a particular area? What in fact are the priorities of the regional health authority? What might be cut if there is a deficit projected for a particular region? How will individuals access service? How does that affect the whole range of services, whether it is within the acute care sector, within the long-term care sector, within the mental health sector, within the provision of public health?

We have had a number of questions and issues around that, because it appears that the services that are least visible – and this tends to happen in almost every department, Mr. Speaker – are the first ones to be cut. The services that are least visible – in providing investigative work with regards to the public health function, in providing preventative work with regards to mental health – those in fact are the services that disappear. And those are the services that may well be the ones that provide a cost savings to the Department of Health and to the regional health authority.

So those are the issues, those are the points that need to be looked at so the community and the health care professionals and everyone, in fact, can sit down with the plan and say: this makes sense; this doesn't make sense; this has a germ of an idea that could well work,

but in fact what needs to happen is we need to look at another way.
Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Long-term Care Review Report

M10. Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the report of the Long-term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee, which was submitted to the Minister of Health in 1998.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to Motion for a Return 10 this particular item has been questioned before. I have indicated that as minister I have received advice on questions posed to the long-term care review committee. However, that particular process dealt with some specific items on which I was seeking advice. There is a report from the long-term care review committee due in November. Certainly it would be our intention, when there is the report of the long-term care committee, that we would be releasing that publicly.

I do not accept Motion for a Return 10 and recommend accordingly.

THE SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MS BARRETT: Did the minister move an amendment?

THE SPEAKER: Sorry; he didn't. You're right. I'm getting too many notes.

MS BARRETT: I think he said that he was not accepting this motion for a return. He acknowledged that he has a report. I want to argue in favour of this report becoming public property. I think it is unworthy of a responsible government to use tax dollars to round up information and then prevent the taxpayers from seeing the information and analysis that was paid for. In this particular case we know that since the budget cuts began in 1993 and with the acute care bed closures that did happen, particularly in Edmonton and Calgary I should say, an enormous squeeze was put on the general public because many of those beds needed were occupied by those requiring long-term care. The result, of course, was that those needing acute care were put on waiting lists, sometimes more than year-long waiting lists. I would argue that it's time the government acknowledged that things are coming home to roost.

I'll point out, for example, that on page 261 of the current budget book there's a notation that says that

\$15 million will be provided this year to address some of the recommendations contained in the interim report of the Long Term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee, including \$6.2 million to address drugs for short-term acute care clients outside a hospital setting.

Now, I'm going to take a little bit of credit for that \$6.2 million because it was me who argued strenuously that it is unfair for a provincial government to say: you have your drugs covered for you while you're in the acute care facility, but the minute that you're out, even though you're still sick, even though you're still taking the prescription drugs that a doctor is prescribing – you're not writing out your own prescriptions; a doctor is prescribing them. You should be entitled to continued coverage for that care while you're recovering at home.

I wouldn't be surprised if the report that we're seeking actually made the same recommendation. I'd be willing to share the credit for the government having finally responded to this with the member

who conducted the review resulting in this hidden report if he'd be prepared to give us this report. So far it's hear no evil, see no evil.

Now, what I believe will be demonstrated by this report is that – and I can only speak definitively about the Edmonton area – our backup in the need for long-term care beds has been exacerbated by what proved to be completely unnecessary cuts throughout the Department of Health, including to all of its funded institutions. I remind you that in each of the years that those cuts were being implemented by an extremely blunt instrument, the government itself was turning in, at the very minimum, \$2 billion a year in surpluses and in one case more than \$3 billion a year. If that money had been redirected into health care and education, the crises that have now come home to roost would never have occurred.

In fact I contend, Mr. Speaker, that the cost to taxpayers – and it's taxpayers' money; let's not kid ourselves – to repair the damage done to, in particular, health and education is actually greater than what it would have cost the government to maintain adequate funding through those four years of budget cutting.

3:30

Recently the Premier said, in response to some questions I had put, that the cuts had stopped. The fact remains that we don't know that. I can give you an example. I believe it was December 12 – if that was a Sunday, then it was December 12 – that I got a call at home from a fellow. He says: Pam, so much for the cuts have stopped; I was pink-slipped on Friday; I work at the General hospital. I said: Richard, you're the groundskeeper. He said: yeah. I said: well, how can they eliminate the groundskeeper? He said: they're going to reassign two people on a part-time basis to do it, and if I want to keep any job at all, I can cut my rate of pay by 25 or 30 percent and take on a different assignment.

I reported it to the Legislature a few days later. I said: the cuts haven't stopped; the layoffs are still happening. By the way, I'm aware of continued layoffs in the health care system. I said: you say that the cuts have stopped; that just means that you've stopped cutting the amount of money going into the system; the system itself is still attempting to recover. That, I believe, points to the real reason we need this report. This report is going to tell you for sure that in Edmonton and area we are at least 700 beds short of what we need for long-term care, primarily for our elderly but not exclusively, as you know.

When you've got 700 people needing long-term care and any one of them goes acute for any reason, guess what? They're going to end up in the acute care facilities. Because their long-term care requirements are – what would you call it? – sort of the threshold upon which the acuity of their medical problems may have developed, chances are very good that their occupancy in the acute care beds is going to be for a longer duration and perhaps of a more intense nature than those other people who are waiting for what is all too often called elective surgery.

I believe that if you fall and break your hip, the ability to walk should not be considered elective surgery. In other words, a hip replacement I don't consider elective; I consider that necessary. In fact, I have a relative in the hospital right now, and I believe he may end up in the Glenrose within a matter of days, which would be appropriate considering his right arm is paralyzed. Kitty-corner from him in this room is a man who finally had his surgery the night before last at 7:30, and he needed to have part of his lung removed. Well, he was originally scheduled for that surgery on March 17. Then it was rescheduled for the 22nd, and of course he got bumped that morning and then had the surgery that night. This is pretty commonplace. I mean, he's suffering a life-threatening disorder here, and he was bumped by nearly a week.

You can see that the problems do continue in the acute care centres. If we had enough long-term care facilities, a number of the patients that are currently in the Royal Alex – and I know, because I'm in there every day visiting my brother; I see them – would not be there. They would be in what we used to call auxiliary hospitals and in some cases nursing homes. That seems to me the crux of the matter.

You know, I think there's nothing unreasonable about this. For heaven's sake, it was submitted to the Minister of Health, I think he acknowledged, in November of 1998. Well, this is March 24, 1999. Earlier today in question period when I asked the minister why he wasn't releasing his blue-ribbon panel report on the legal massaging of Bill 27, he said that he needed a while to consider it. Well, he received it on Monday. Today is Wednesday. He said: well, you know, I'm not going to release it till the end of the month. I got up and I said: well, he must be a real slow reader. Now, two days I think is long enough to read a report that was specifically commissioned to look at the legal implications of a bill on which, after I'd been fighting this bill for six weeks, finally the Premier said that, yes, it could legalize private, for-profit hospitals.

Me, I don't know how much higher up in the food chain you need to go than the Premier saying this before the bill should be shunted. Nonetheless, the government, you know, can never admit that it's wrong. I've noticed this. I mean, the Premier is one creature. When he's wrong, he admits it. But in the collective they're never wrong. Did you ever notice that, Mr. Speaker. They're never wrong.

A funny vote happened in the Chamber last week. I believe it was a private member's motion or bill, and it was pretty clear from the sounds of the votes on the floor that it had passed. [interjection] Which one? It was your motion? It was the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark's motion. We looked up when whoever was in the chair said: it seems it failed. And we said: no; it passed. Then what happened, of course, is that we went for a division, all the government members came back into the Chamber, and they all voted as a bloc. Well, that's the way they act when the government has made a mistake. They vote as a bloc. They act as a bloc.

I'm sure it would be an admission that the minister reads more slowly than maybe even a grade 1 or 2 student if he had to acknowledge that it's taken him all this time to read the report on the state of long-term care in Alberta. I wouldn't want to admit that it takes me five or six months to read a report. In fact, I would be embarrassed to say . . . [interjection] I agree. I agree. I'm making a joke. In fact, I wouldn't want to say that I hadn't read a critically important report in two days.

I don't believe that the minister hasn't read either of those reports. I believe that the reason the government is withholding these reports is because it wants to put those reports through a massage treatment; in other words, find out from the spin doctors just how they're going to be able to face reporters when they see in black and white that the advisory committee discovered that in the Edmonton area alone - the Edmonton catchment area; you know what I mean - 700 people are needing long-term care beds. Seven hundred. And they're going to have to face the reporters, particularly the Health minister, and say: well, you know, this really isn't a result of all the cuts that we imposed in our acute care and long-term care facilities during the years that we were taking the major axe to the budget. I mean, this can't be coincidence. Year after year you go cut, cut, cut by billions of dollars, and then you end up with billions of dollars in surplus. It's no accident. How are they going to face the reporters? I think that's what's behind the stonewalling on this particular report.

The minister of advanced education said: don't throw stones. Obviously I was making an example of what the minister himself had said earlier today when he said that he only received it two days

ago, that he needs time to review it. I say review means read, not read, contemplate, and talk to the PR doctors about how you're going to justify your attempts to ram a noxious bill through the Legislature, finally letting it die on the Order Paper only after tens of thousands of people, record numbers of people – in fact, I've never seen record numbers of people like this fighting legislation since they were told by the public in 1984 to disallow extra billing by physicians.

I have not seen a reaction on any public issue so great as on Bill 37, which the minister has been sitting on for two days, which the minister will probably release just before the Easter recess, because I'm pretty sure that being chaired by a law professor, one of the first things that report is going to say is: yes, the NDP was right; Bill 37 would have allowed private, for-profit hospitals; it was poorly written and poorly thought out.

Now, who knows what the opening chapter or even the executive summary says about the state of long-term care in Alberta, but I believe that inevitably the report must conclude that the government's cuts to both acute care and long-term care, particularly acute care, directly resulted in a backlog of people waiting for long-term care, many of whom are frequently or occasionally occupying, through no fault of their own, acute care beds in our hospitals, which means directly a prevention of other people being able to get in.

I'll close, Mr. Speaker, by observing how ironic it is that in the three days of the Day budget, in the three days that we got and in all the leaks that made it to the front pages of the newspapers, the government telling us well in advance of March 11 how much money it was going to spend on education, how much money it was going to spend on health – the government had the gall to even outline exactly how many nurses, for example, it wanted the regional health authorities to hire to replace some but nowhere near all of the direct health care providers that were laid off during those unnecessary years of slash and burn. The reason I point this out, the irony, is because this is precisely the information that is going to come back to haunt the very government that executed the most unthought-out, ideologically driven series of budgetary cuts in the most cherished program Canadians know, that being health care.

3:40

My suspicion is that the Health minister will eventually release this report but not until after he's had time to make special little additional postbudget announcements. You know how they always happen, Mr. Speaker. They happen after the House has adjourned for the session and the government is starting to prepare for orders in council and starting to get ready for the supplementary supply estimates that we inevitably will deal with in the fall. They start making these little announcements: oh, gee, I betcha \$5 million would be really useful right now in expanding a long-term care facility or initiating a new one. Then, you know, a few months later it will be an extra \$3 million. Then in the dog days of summer, that's when the government just says: okay; Friday afternoon, 4 o'clock. [interjection]

Oh, that's when they always release the bad news. Come on. I've been around here a long time. I was here the day the government shut down the Principal Group. You know what? They did it about 4:30; I believe it was a Friday. I was still working at 6 o'clock at night, and the reporters came into my office and they said: "Hey, you're the only person in the building. Can you respond to this?" I said: I think so. Well, I'm capable of being in the building at 6 o'clock on Friday the whatever of August to respond to the government's attempt to finally release the report, by then a year and a half old, and hope that it goes nowhere.

This Health minister should know what the previous Health minister, now the Leader of the Official Opposition, knows. I'll

play hockey on this floor. Health is the primary and driving reason that I'm in politics. I will play hockey and I will stickhandle and I will make sure that Albertans' interests are best served, even if it means pulling a screaming and yelling government into order, if it means being here on the Friday at 4:30, 6 o'clock or whatever it takes in the middle of August when the minister finally releases his report. I'll tell you what. I'm going to polish his halo and pull it down a few inches, because I have absolutely no doubt that this report is going to put the government on the hot seat. By then all the minister has to say is: well, that's an old report; we've subsequently rectified that, not just with our 1999 budget, oh no, but we've got postbudget announcements. And he'll trot out that \$5 million thing and that \$3 million thing.

Mark my words. I've been around too long. I know this government. That's what they're planning to do. I say shame on them. Cough it up now. Cough it up.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak in favour of this motion for a return that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has put forward requesting the release of the interim report of the Long-term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that it's containing information that a lot of people are waiting for – this is both health professionals and legislators in this Assembly – which would give us information that we could be passing on to our constituents.

It's information, and this government has a very interesting idea of what to do with information. They don't seem to want to share it very much. They seem to want to hoard it. Contrary to what they might have been told as small children, information does not breed and mutate into strange, scary things. You can release it. It's a powerful sharing tool. It increases and advances the world. We can do many good things with information. So I'm always a little suspicious about this government's reluctance to release information.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

You know, I think sometimes there's nothing nefarious going on at all, but the government is so used to not releasing information that it looks guilty even when it isn't, because it hoards that information and refuses to give it out. It may well be that there's good news in this long-term care review or that the minister is going to look good by releasing this. That's fine. But somehow this habit of never releasing information for fear that other people will know I think makes the government look very bad, because it makes it look like the government is hiding something or that there's such bad information. I mean, it has our colleague from Edmonton-Highlands believing that it will eventually be released late on a Friday night because it has such bad information. Now, where is she coming up with that idea? It's because the information is rarely shared by this government.

The other thing that makes me realize that there is good, powerful information in this review and that it should be shared publicly is that there are a number of points that relate to it in the budget. I think it's page 261 in the budget. I notice that it's talking about money that has been put into this year's budget to conform with the ideas or proposals or recommendations that are coming forward in the long-term care committee report. I'm also noticing that in the government and ministry business plans it's mentioned again. This time I'm reading on page 182.

The input and collaboration of numerous stakeholder groups is

crucial to maintain and improve health. Priority challenges identified through stakeholder consultations, and the analysis of relevant information

is important, "ensuring Albertans get the care they need," and "preparing for the future."

I think long-term care is specifically mentioned under major initiatives. Obviously this budget was prepared some time ago, perhaps even as far back as August of '98, which is when the minister received this interim report. So decisions were made in this budget year that came out of that long-term report.

What is the problem in sharing the information? It's already been used to put things into this budget. I guess my question is: if it hasn't been, then why is this money in this budget, if it is not backed up and supported by information in that? And how are we to know until the report is released?

I've heard other people mention it, so I will be brief with this. Long-term care is of great concern to Albertans, I would hazard to say anybody over 50, as we begin to recognize the frailty of our own bodies and think: what if I really got ill?

DR. TAYLOR: You're not over 50.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, I'm not, and thank you for the compliment.

People start to realize that they might end up being quite ill and in need of long-term care. Perhaps they have a relative that's in a long-term care facility, and they're thinking: "Hmm, what's it going to be like when I'm in need of a long-term care facility. What kinds of plans is the government making? Could I have any input on this, any feedback from it?" Perhaps you are nursing or aiding someone who's in a long-term care facility and you think: you know, I've got some good suggestions here about what could improve this system.

We know that when we get into crises with the hospitals, we hear that acute care beds are not available and that surgeries have to be canceled because in fact the beds are occupied by long-term care patients. That's an important thing for us in this province. We don't want to see any more of those kinds of emergencies caused. We don't want to see any more of the red alert emergencies, where people are being transferred from emergency room to emergency room. Certainly that link between acute care and long-term care is really important. We need to explore it, and we need the information to explore it.

I have often spoken of the number of concerned, intelligent, active senior citizens that live in the constituency of Edmonton-Centre, and they are very clear in asking me the questions. They want to know what information is out there. They want to see and read and give feedback on this interim report because they're planning now for what their long-term care needs are. Not only long-term in the sense we're speaking of here, long-term health needs, but what do they need to plan to look after themselves over the next year, the next five years, the next 10, the next 25 years?

They're planning that information now. I think the final version of this report is due out a year from now. They don't want to have to wait another year to get enough information to make decisions about their own lives. Are they going to stay in the same facility that they're in now? If so, how long should they stay there? Should they be making arrangements to move somewhere else? Should they be looking at power of attorney? Are there other health factors that they should be examining in their life?

3:50

This is a very long long-term care committee report. I think it was originally established or asked for in 1996. We had an interim report in August of '98, and now we're told the final report: in the

spring of 2000. That's a long, long, long long-term care report, and I urge the government to be forthcoming with it as soon as possible.

So those were the few remarks that I wanted to bring forward. I think there may well be nothing to hide here, but I have to say that the government sure looks bad by hiding it. I don't know how to help the government any more if they're so insistent on automatically . . .

MS LEIBOVICI: Do you try?

MS BLAKEMAN: I do try.

There is an automatic tendency by this government to hoard information, and I don't think it does them any favours. Certainly sometimes it makes them look downright guilty, like they have something to hide, and that may well not be the case. So in my never ending attempts to assist the government, I would strongly encourage them to release this document as soon as possible, to get the widest possible distribution for it, to get the best feedback. It's an interim report. We know it's not due for some time. There are a lot of distribution sources here in this Legislative Assembly, in our staff, in our constituency offices that could be assisting the government in getting that report out there, reviewed, additional information brought forward, additional suggestions and ideas.

If we're going to wait another year before it's released, I think that slows down the whole process, and I'm frankly concerned on behalf of some of the constituents of Edmonton-Centre in having to wait a year for that information. I don't think that helps them with their ability to plan their own lives and the lives of their family.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak in favour of the motion for a return put forward by Edmonton-Meadowlark. Thanks, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure this afternoon to rise to speak to Motion for a Return 10. I'm in favour of this particular motion. I think that it's long overdue, this report by the Long-term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee. I recall that even at our fall sitting of 1998, we asked for its release at that time, and still at this time we haven't had a hint of what appears in that particular report.

Now, the one reason that I'm quite concerned about this delay in the reporting or seeing the report, which I'm sure the hon. members did that happened to have the opportunity to do the report – and I'm sure they did a very thorough report – is that many of the people that we find in our long-term care facilities in Alberta today are seniors and time is a very precious commodity for many of those seniors.

It's at the point right now in this province where many of our acute care beds are not being used for acute care but for long-term care, and we do have a tremendous backlog in this province of people requiring long-term care beds. Therefore, I would urge the minister to release this report. It was first commissioned I believe in 1996, and the interim report was completed in August of 1998. I'm certain that this report will not be shredded, as we have seen done with other government documents on seniors.

Speaking about our seniors, they are the most studied group here in the province and rightfully so. They have made such outstanding contributions to the development of this particular province. Not only that, Madam Speaker, but this particular group has been the hardest hit group of any group in this province by the cutbacks which started occurring in 1993.

MR. SMITH: When did they stop, Bill?

MR. BONNER: Well, I'm glad they stopped, but they never should have taken place to the point they did, Madam Speaker.

Many of these seniors who had planned well for their retirement, had worked hard, all of a sudden were stripped of many of the assets that they had looked forward to in providing them the comforts that they had worked hard for, that they deserved, and that they should have had during their retirement.

There are many things along these lines that those seniors do deserve, and one certainly is long-term care beds as they grow older. This is another thing that they had planned on, that health care would be there for them when they required it. We have in this province done surveys, and if there's one question that all of these people ask, it is: will the health care system be there for me when I require it? So I certainly hope that the minister today will agree to release this report. It will provide us with a tremendous amount of information about our long-term care beds.

It's one of those situations where it isn't a case of a problem sneaking up on us. For example, back in 1991 we knew at that particular stage that approximately 11 percent of our population here in the province were seniors aged 65 or more. By the year 2001 we know that figure will grow to 13.6 percent, and it will continue to grow until the year 2031, when 24.9 percent of the population of this province will be aged 65 or more. So this is not a problem. This is a reality, and it is something that has to be addressed. Just as we have a backlog of seniors waiting – not only seniors but all Albertans that require long-term beds – we have a backlog now in the construction of these particular facilities.

I also have a great deal of difficulty here, Madam Speaker, when we look at a budget which was prepared this year and which at first glance certainly looked like a very good budget, and we can only think that some of the information used in that particular budget was from this particular report. That is very disconcerting to our seniors, particularly our seniors who have no place to go.

I know that on numerous occasions in this House the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert has referred to constituents of hers who could be housed in long-term care beds in St. Albert but do not have that opportunity. They have to be moved an hour, an hour and a half drive away from where their loved one is. Not only that; when we remove these people from there, we also remove them from their supports, whether it be family, church, community, whatever. These are situations that I'm sure were addressed.

4:00

It certainly is shameful in a province that is as rich as Alberta and able to provide so many things for all of us that people have to do this, that we haven't even been able to break down those boundaries that exist between the regional health authorities to be able to freely move people back and forth so that they can remain close to loved ones. Particularly for those people in long-term care beds now in the province, wouldn't it be great if in that report, that wonderful report – I believe the hon. Member for Redwater was part of that committee – there were a solution where these people could stay closer to their loved ones in their communities and did not have to move away?

I look at another situation here where a senior couple died, one on one day, one on the next. Unfortunately, one of the couple had Alzheimer's and didn't have to be but was in a different facility. So these people had lived their entire lives together, had celebrated their 60th anniversary, and in their latter years, in the twilight years of their lives they were not allowed to, could not stay in the same facility. So I really think that we are doing a great injustice to

people in this province when we don't release this information.

Now, I look back to articles, particularly one that appeared in the *Edmonton Journal* on Saturday, March 6. This was reporting on the United Nurses of Alberta conference. It was attended by 250 delegates who talked about "improving care for aging and disabled Albertans living in nursing homes." This is one of the quotes: "Long-term care has been ignored," said UNA president Heather Smith. "Long-term care has been ignored, yet we have a growing demand in this province for it.

We as legislators in this province are supposed to have vision. We have vision. We know what is facing us. We know that we have a desperate need in this province for long-term care beds, yet we are doing nothing about it. We are sitting on a report and will not release it until later this year. So after the report was completed, it is going to take more than a year to put this into any sort of action. For those people in this province that do require long-term beds, I think it is imperative that this government release that report.

With those comments, Madam Speaker, I will take my seat and listen to the comments of other members in this Assembly in regards to this pressing need.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to support the motion in front of us. In the motion we refer to the interim report, and the interim report I refer to is the interim report that is referred to in the business plan summary of Health and the budget, which states:

\$15 million will be provided this year to address some of the recommendations contained in the interim report of the Long Term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee, including \$6.2 million to address drugs for short-term acute care clients outside a hospital setting.

So that's the report that I'm referring to, the interim report that obviously has to be in somebody's hands. How do you give money on the basis of a report that you don't have? How do you spend \$6.2 million on a recommendation of a report you haven't seen, a report that's not there?

So I speak in support of it. I speak to it for a number of reasons. I just have to back up a bit. Prior to 1989 I sat on the board of what was then called the Edmonton and region long-term care district No. 24, which became Capital Care. I sat on the board of that for a number of years. The Member for Edmonton-Calder did as well, and our former Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar did as well. We learned a great deal about long-term care and even some of the problems that were starting to arise then. Already at that point there was some indication that government had to do something about the pending shortage of beds. It became obvious even at that time that if there was a shortage of beds for long-term care, long-term care patients would be using up beds in acute care facilities, which are much, much more costly.

It was during that period of time that I met for the very first time a person many of you in the House would be familiar with, and that's Dianne Mirosh. Dianne Mirosh was a Member of the Legislative Assembly at the time on the government side, and she took a special interest in long-term care. In fact, the government asked her – I believe Marvin Moore was minister at the time – to head up a review committee on long-term care. She came forward with a report after a number of months, a year – whatever length of time it took I can't recall – the Mirosh report. It was a glowing report, which many members on the government side raved about as

a report that recognized even back then that there were problems pending, that if government didn't move to correct those problems, we would pay the price. Even though government praised that report and we praised that report, I don't believe the recommendations were really acted upon. To the best of my memory, I can't recall them being acted upon.

Dianne Mirosh of course has gone on, has left this place. She's now the executive director of the Long Term Care Association. I listened to her the other day on the radio. She is now speaking sort of a little differently. She's urging her former colleagues to do something about this situation. It is recognized that there is a dramatic shortage of long-term care beds. There are estimates that – is it 30 percent? – as high as 30 percent of the beds in acute care hospitals like the University, for example, are occupied by persons that are waiting for long-term care beds.

I can recall being in the University hospital, and there was an elderly gentleman in there who had undergone surgery. It was a skin flap similar to the surgery I went through. He was on one of these air pressure beds, the same as I was. These air pressure beds go out at about \$60 a day. Now, because he was in the University hospital waiting for a long-term care bed, the hospital ruled that he could stay there but they could not pay the cost of that bed. His relatives were not comfortable with his giving up that bed before he went to a long-term care facility, so they had to pay the \$60 per day.

That's not the moral of the story here, the crunch of the story. The crunch of the story is that there was him, but there were many others in that same situation, that were occupying those beds because they could not be moved to a long-term care facility because there weren't beds available. The waiting list was too long. Of course, those beds at the University hospital or the Royal Alex hospital: what do they charge out a day to the government? Is it – what now? – about \$1,000 a day? Possibly even more. Probably about 10 times what the cost would be in a long-term care facility.

At the same time, we do have people who are in long-term care facilities but not the appropriate facility, Madam Speaker. It may be too far from the family, but they have no choice because in their particular area there isn't a bed available. It's quite ironic. I can recall contacting you as the MLA for your area to act on behalf of the person that was in that situation. You did act on that person's behalf, and thankfully that's one that was corrected. That person was placed in a bed close enough to the family, and everybody was happy. Now, that's one case. Of course there are many, many others there that are still waiting and that are going to continue to wait.

Obviously, when a report is commissioned, when the government asks for a report, they ask for a report because they realize there's a problem there that has to be addressed. Otherwise, why would you ask for that report? The fact that this report is taking so long to do, taking forever and ever, suggests that the problem is very, very, very critical and they're having an extremely difficult time trying to address the problems that are there. In fact, the government may be finding it almost impossible to address those problems and come out with suitable recommendations. That's why it becomes so important to release whatever information is available.

If there is an interim report, release it so that professional people in the field can react to it, so that they can assist government in finalizing the report by coming out with suitable recommendations. Members of this particular caucus could provide some valuable input if we were to see that interim report to see what basis that input should be provided on.

4:10

Madam Speaker, I see the Member for Redwater listening very intently, which is great because he is, I understand, chairman of this

committee. He probably has seen the report, I would suspect. Just nod. Possibly even his colleagues are hiding the report from him. Who knows, eh? Possibly the minister has the report. We don't know who has the report, but there has to be some information there. How long now has the committee been meeting? How long has it been in place?

AN HON. MEMBER: Three years.

MR. WICKMAN: Three years? Thirty-six months. In 36 months they have to have some documentation, and they have to report to somebody. So somebody on the government side should be able to stand up and say: well, we don't have the complete findings, we don't have the total report, and we don't have the final report; however, we have this . . . [interjection] Did the member from Lethbridge-West wish me to respond to a question? [interjection] Oh, thank you. Very accommodating. Now, could the member stand up again, possibly, and tell us what's in that report, be a little more specific?

Madam Speaker, again on a serious note. It is a very critical situation. I'm sure that every MLA in this Legislative Assembly, every MLA, unless they're not doing their job properly in terms of their constituency office and their constituency, has dealt with a problem of a family member, whatever, approaching the constituency office and saying: "Look; I have a problem. I have a mother, I have a dad, I have an uncle, whatever, that is waiting for a bed. They've been waiting now for 24 months, and they simply can't get a bed. Is there anything you can do to help?" In some instances it may be that a bed is available, but it's 40 miles away, and the family is saying: can you do something to help us get that person in a facility that is more for the well-being of the person that needs the bed and for the well-being of the family? Let's face it; it's better that that person be as close to the family as possible.

In my constituency alone over the 10 years that I've been here, 10 years as of March 20 incidentally, I've had – well, I'm not going to say hundreds; that would be exaggerating. Dozens and dozens over the 10 years have come to talk to me about that particular problem, and it has developed as the years have gone by. We know that.

Even if the government had stood up and made an amendment saying that they can't accept the motion for a return as is, made an amendment that they can't release the interim report but that they can release whatever information is available – maybe there's only 99 percent of the interim report done. Maybe the index isn't done, but everything else is.

I have to refer back to this document that talks in terms specifically about the \$15 million being allocated to deal with recommendations in that particular report. That interim report I think would be a real eye-opener, because I would suspect it would shed further light on exactly how many throughout the province are on waiting lists, exactly how many beds we would be able to free up in the acute care hospitals. Rather than pour money into the active hospitals, maybe if we recognized the need for dollars in long-term care, shifted some there so that some of the persons who are occupying the acute care hospitals and using up beds, creating expenditure there could create less expenditure here. It's been said by members of that side of the House that it's not how much money you have; it's how it's spent. Well, obviously if they can accommodate a person for \$100 a day rather than \$1,000 a day, why wouldn't we do something to try and achieve that goal?

Madam Speaker, I do recognize that there probably are some government members that want to get up and voice an opinion on this particular subject. We probably have another member of our caucus that would probably like to talk about some of the difficulties

in the riding of Edmonton-Norwood, who probably would face even more concerns than I would because of the nature of that constituency.

So on that particular note I'm just going to make a plea as I conclude. Do the right thing. Yes, do the right thing, Minister of Economic Development and lotteries. Do the right thing and urge your colleagues to release this interim report so that we can get on with good business.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I, too, rise to support my colleague's request that

the Assembly do issue for a return showing the report of the Long-term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee, which was submitted to the Minister of Health in 1998.

Actually, I draw attention to what I heard today. One, the minister has another report, and that report hasn't yet been shared with the Premier, so the Premier doesn't know what's happening there. Then I saw the Member for Redwater shaking his head no when he was asked if he had seen the report. You know that that member is the chairman, and he's shaking his head, no, I haven't seen that report. Boy, I have a real problem with the kind of consultation that's going on over there then. If he has decided that he's only to sit in a chair and occupy space and not know what's going on, then we have a really serious problem. [interjections] I've hit a nerve, Madam Speaker.

I hope that this member gets up to respond to this and defend why the government won't release publicly funded, publicly paid for documents in a timely manner. Like I said earlier, you know, by the time the hon. member's report is released, he's going to need the long-term care himself. He's going to be that old.

Madam Speaker, I want to draw the attention of the Assembly to page 261 in the government and lottery fund estimates. I note that \$15 million will be provided this year to address some of the recommendations contained in the interim report of the Long Term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee, including \$6.2 million to address drugs for short-term acute care clients outside a hospital setting.

So we can take that \$6.2 million off and we have \$8.7 million.

My concern, Madam Speaker, is that the government knows what's in the report. They've said: we're going to put some money to the interim report. The heels are dug in on the actual conclusion of the report being produced, and nobody cares to share it with Albertans, much less this Assembly. Albertans have a right to know.

Every single person in this Assembly has received calls about long-term care, and those in the rural areas have received calls about family members having to be relocated to another city, a foreign environment, a foreign town, in order to be able to access facilities. Even the Minister of Justice has received those calls. I know he has, and he's going to rise on a point of order.

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice on a point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, just some clarification, Madam Speaker. She's made this comment that all members have received these calls. Perhaps she can provide some evidence of actually having that

knowledge, and if she does have that evidence, then she should also perhaps name all the people who have called us too.

MS OLSEN: Madam Speaker, what the Justice minister has just suggested I do would – I think third party comes to my mind. You know, the people that call me and contact me and e-mail me after maybe contacting other members, I would have to get their approval, and it would take me a long time to do that. The hon. Minister of Justice knows that third party is an issue under FOIP. You know, I don't think there's a point of order.

4:20

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Possibly, hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, if the discussion took place in regard to your own constituency and your thoughts on the particular motion, then we wouldn't get into this provocative debate.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Permission to continue. I will no longer be provocative to the Minister of Justice. He's a little thin skinned. I don't know.

MR. HAVELOCK: Workplace harassment.

MS OLSEN: I think he's getting a little carried away now, because he's drawing into some very serious issues here. Workplace harassment is serious, and we don't want him to get himself into trouble. So I'm going to focus, Madam Speaker, right on you and focus on this question. We're going to go back to the interim report.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: I have yet to hear any salable reasons why this interim report can't be released. If public money is going into support of recommendations from that report, why wouldn't this particular Assembly know about it? Why wouldn't Albertans know what those recommendations are? What is there to hide? Are there going to be more? In fact, are they going to rejig the whole system and then decide that maybe old folks won't have to go from Vermilion to Vegreville, that they're going to have to go from Lloydminster to Hinton to get a bed? Is that what the issue is here? Do they have those kinds of problems? Are the efficiencies that bad? What's to hide behind releasing this report? I think there's some responsibility to this Assembly and to Albertans. This government continually hides from recommendations.

I'm puzzled as to why we have to walk down this road. If the issue is that it's an interim report, let's think about the fact: then why are we taking action on an interim report? Why are we using public funds, then, to look after some interim issues? Where is the longitudinal view here? Where is the long-term plan for long-term care? Are we only going to do this in little bits and pieces? Are we only going to take one recommendation and piecemeal this together without any systematic approach to what's happening? That's not what Albertans want.

Albertans want a solid, long-term plan to long-term care, and that's not what they're getting. They're getting piecemeal action by a government that doesn't know whether they're coming or going. They don't get it. Here we are; we've been in this Assembly two years. The hon. member has been chair of this committee for just about as long, and he has yet to share with Albertans the outcome of his report. Maybe he works slowly. I don't know. Maybe slow is what is in the mind of the hon. Member for Redwater. Quite frankly, Albertans don't have that time. Albertans don't have the time to wait for the hon. member to have his report released. Maybe the Minister of Health could push and nudge the hon. member to get

that report out. As I say, we sit here and we wait and we wait and we wait. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. minister for science, research, and information technology, I think that if the hon. Member for Redwater wants to ask a question, he can certainly rise and ask one. He doesn't need your assistance.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: You know, Madam Speaker, I would be delighted to hear the hon. minister respond in some way. I need to be enlightened, and I haven't heard anything coming from over there that enlightens this side of the House. We're a long way from understanding what the problem is with the release of the report, and that leads me to believe that those folks on the other side, the government, are a long way from understanding what the problem is.

So we talk about better management, we talk about looking at the system as it functions now, and we talk about the necessity to use funding wisely. I'm waiting to see where that's all going to happen. I would love for the hon. Member for Redwater to let us know, to maybe stand up and rise to the occasion and tell Albertans exactly why he's not releasing a report where \$15 million is going to be attached to long-term care. [interjection] Yeah, we don't know what it's for. We don't know where portions of that money are going and what exactly that is going to fix. Is that going to put four more beds in Vegreville and three more beds in Crowsnest Pass? Is that it? Are we talking about some extended home care options? Are we talking about opening up another facility? Are we talking about moving all the folks who require long-term care from the north to the south? What are we doing here? There's no rational reason that that member could offer, that the minister could offer for that report not to be released when this money is provided for in the current budget year.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will take my place, and I'm sure there'll be more from one of my colleagues.

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

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For the last few Wednesdays I think we have been faced with a very interesting situation in the House. The opposition members have raised an extremely long list of written questions and motions for returns, and I appreciate that it is their right to do so. However, they should realize that it is private members' day, and there are many, many other ways to achieve what they are trying to do without wasting the time of the Legislature. For example, for this motion they can easily write a letter and send it to the Minister of Health asking the same question, and they will receive a response in writing telling them exactly why the report cannot be released. The answer is very, very simple.

MS OLSEN: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

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

Point of Order Private Members' Business

MS OLSEN: Yes. Actually I'm going to use 23(i), "imputes false

or unavowed motives to another member.” Madam Speaker, this is private members’ day. It’s all fine and dandy for the hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose to rise and say that we shouldn’t be up here talking about questions and motions and those kinds of things. This is private members’ day. This is private members’ business, and we have every right to be up here discussing this, talking to these issues as long as it takes to get the necessary information.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair will give you a point of clarification. There isn’t a point of order here; 23(i), imputing false motives, does not pertain to this. [interjection] Excuse me, hon. minister.

The situation is that under our Standing Orders we do have Written Questions and Motions for Returns. That is the process for Wednesday afternoon. Beginning with Orders of the Day, this is the first order of business, followed next by bills that are other than government bills. So the situation, hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose, is that we are dealing with the issue before us, which is Motion for a Return 10. That is the debate that has taken place over the last several minutes. We are not about to debate in the House whether or not in fact we should continue on Wednesday afternoons with Written Questions and Motions for Returns.

So, please, on Motion 10.

4:30

MR. PHAM: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that clarification. I never said that they don’t have the right to do so. I appreciate they have the right to do so. What I am suggesting is there is always a better way of achieving the same thing, and I am trying to recommend that to the hon. members from the other side of the House so that they can use their House time more effectively. But if they don’t want to listen to that advice, if they want to go on and put thousands of motions for returns on the Order Paper, it’s their right. It frustrates us a lot when we see that there are many other important things, like private members’ bills, which are not being addressed because of this prolonged debate in the House.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, the chair is just saying to you that this is not the time you can debate the merit of whether in fact we should have motions for returns and written questions. We are in fact on Motion for a Return 10, and we have to deal with the contents of that motion, that is before us.

Debate Continued

MR. PHAM: Thank you. Then for that motion the answer is very, very simple, and somehow it did not get through to the members from the other side. The report is not completed yet, and you should not ask for a report that is not completed to be returned. It is the interim report.

I have been working in this Legislature for six years now, and the most amazing thing is that there is a process for everything. An incomplete report is not a report. You cannot have a half-baked cake. Either it is done or it is not done. If it is not done yet, please stay tuned. Be patient. Let the report work through the process, and it will be released in due time. Why are you standing up and saying, “Release the first two pages of the report,” and then a month from now say, “Release the next four pages, please”? It doesn’t make any sense to me at all, and that’s why I feel that it is an absolutely unnecessary motion. The report will be done sooner or later. As soon as it is done, as soon as it is looked at by the government department, it will be released to every one of us.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’ve been listening this afternoon with disgust to comments made from the other side of the room here. They can’t even get their facts straight. They say that it’s been ongoing for three years, started in ’96 – I wasn’t even here in ’96 – that it’s going to be released in 2000. Is this how you guys go into the constituency and tell the constituents untruths? That’s exactly what you guys do. Get your facts straight. First of all, the report will come out, and when it’s ready, it will be released. I will not release a half-baked report, like my colleague for Calgary-Montrose has said. When it’s complete, you’ll see it.

Thank you.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It’s been a pleasure to hear my colleagues on both sides of the House address this particular issue, because it is an issue that is of extreme importance to Albertans. But what I find very interesting is the comments that have been made by the two government members respecting a “half-baked” report and, quite frankly, the ignorance that’s shown with regards to the process on long-term care that has been held in this province over the last three years. It is true that it was prior to the election of the Member for Redwater, so perhaps it would be instructive for that member to actually look at the history of this particular issue.

Now, when we talk about a “half-baked report,” Madam Speaker, it’s amazing to me that the government would actually put dollars towards a half-baked report. This I am not making up. It’s from the Minister of Health’s own budgetary documents, the 1999-2000 government and lottery fund estimates. I hope the Member for Calgary-Montrose is listening with both ears and the Member for Redwater as well. It says verbatim:

\$15 million will be provided this year to address some of the recommendations contained in the interim report of the Long Term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee.

That’s the half-baked report you were talking about, Calgary-Montrose, and that half-baked report provided \$15 million towards the budget for needed services in this province.

So what we have been asking, very simply – and I’ve made that point before as well – is that if in fact the minister feels there is not, because there is not, a full report right now from the long-term care advisory committee – but we did not ask for that in the motion. If the members bothered to take the time to read it word for word, they would have recognized that what we said and what we asked for . . . [interjection] Half-baked is your word, Minister of Justice; it is not my word. The report could be interim, could not be interim. It is the report – and we know there is an interim report – of the Long Term Care Review Policy Advisory Committee, which was submitted to the Minister of Health in 1998. Could it be simpler, Madam Speaker? I don’t think so.

What we have is a minister and we have a chair of a committee and we have members of the government side, who supposedly are in the loop, who say: there’s no report. Well, there is a report that has provided funding for needed services. Whether it’s interim or not is beside the point. There is a report or there is not a report. If there is not a report, how can you have it listed in the budgetary documents, Madam Speaker?

So let’s get back to reality here. The minister has indicated on a number of occasions that he cannot provide this, that in fact the report is really not there, that it’s an imaginary thing that we’ve

spent \$15 million on, and that the minister receives advice from this committee. Well, we know that's not the case. We know there's a written document, and if there's not a written document, there must be minutes of the meetings that would have provided that information to the minister, and perhaps that is the interim report that was talked about by the minister. There must be in writing somewhere a report that the minister and his department made those decisions on, and there are other decisions that have been made in the budgetary documents that reflect perhaps some of the information that is within this long-term care report.

Now, we know that the Member for Redwater has been putting forward a process throughout this province that has engaged many individuals who have in good faith come to meetings to discuss the situation of long-term care in this province and to discuss the potential future of long-term care in this province as well. My submission is that they are working with incomplete information, Madam Speaker. In order to be fair to those individuals who have crossed this province now and over the next few months while the Member for Redwater is gathering his information, that process needs to be as complete as possible. In order for that process to be as complete as possible, the minister needs to share that information that he has received not just last year but over a number of years.

Let's just focus on last year, on the report that we know recommendations have come from and that actions have been taken on by this government, that in fact that information is made public. What is the use of having citizens across this province engage in a process with incomplete information? What is the use? There needs to be that openness, there needs to be that transparency, there needs to be that honesty with the citizens of this province to say: this is what we have found out to this point in time, and these are possible suggestions that have been made. I'm not saying that the suggestions that have been made through this budget process are bad suggestions or not needed suggestions. What I'm saying is: let's see what the full range was, let's see what the options were that were presented to the minister, and let's see what those options are that are going to be put forward when the long-term care review finally submits its report, hopefully in November of 1999.

4:40

This is a process that has been going on, whether the Member for Redwater realizes it or not, since 1996. This is a process that in fact now has a three-year history and needs to be provided so that citizens can see where this province is moving with the critical issue of long-term care. It is a critical issue right now, Madam Speaker. It is an issue that is affecting the acute care services within our hospitals. It is an issue that is affecting the ability to provide other needed health care services within our regional health authorities. There is no reason, no rationale, nothing that I can think of that would prevent this minister from providing those recommendations. Absolutely nothing.

We know there is an interim report, because if not, the budget documents have lied. We know that the Member for Redwater has been providing information to the minister, because if not, then the statements of the minister have been contrary to the information that has been provided to us by the minister on that particular issue. So we know there's a basis for the development of the final report, that will be submitted in November. Why would that basis not be shared with Albertans? It surprises me, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, that the Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan in his capacity as chair of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities would not on behalf of that organization ask for that report. It surprises me that the Member for Calgary-West in her capacity as chair of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta and

the former chair of that Seniors Advisory Council should also not ask for those reports. They do a disservice to those organizations.

I'm not sure if the Member for Redwater is indicating to me that they do have those reports, but if they have the reports, then everyone in this province should have the reports.

To the Member for Calgary-Montrose, the reality is that we have the T-shirts. We have the T-shirts that say that we've tried this. We have the T-shirts that say that we've written the letters. We have the T-shirts that say that we've asked publicly as well as privately – not in my capacity but the former Health critic and the seniors critic – for this report. It hasn't worked, Madam Speaker, and that is why we are asking for this report today.

There are of course many crucial issues that private members have on the Order Paper, but, you know, one of the most crucial issues in this province at this point in time is health care. Amongst that and top of mind with regards to health care as a crucial issue in this province is long-term care. Unless we address that issue, unless we address it seriously and we address it with immediacy, we cannot solve the problems that are occurring within the health care system at this point in time. To have the minister say, as he did with the report on Bill 37, as we're seeing happening with respect to Bill 204, that what we need to do is study it – "I need to look at it; I need lots of time" – that's what we're seeing with this report as well, and it's not good enough. Quite frankly, Madam Speaker, it's not good enough.

The consultations are supposed to be finished at the end of March. That's my information, that they're being extended. That would be useful information to know as well.

DR. TAYLOR: Is it the end of March yet?

MS LEBOVICI: That's within one week. Why does it take, minister of information technology, eight months . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Meadowlark, through the chair.

MS LEBOVICI: Why, Madam Speaker, if we may ask the question to the minister of technology, does it take eight months for a minister to review a report when supposedly the consultations are over by the end of March? That's an awfully long time when we have had indications that this minister can move quickly. We saw it with the immediate, overnight appointment of the blue-ribbon panel on Bill 37, and within two months, three months that report is in on a major issue. We've seen it with the health summit, where immediately that occurred and where, I understand, the report will be provided sometime in April. Yet with the long-term committee it's going to drag on until November.

It only behooves this government to provide some indication of the work of the Member for Redwater, who, the minister has informed us, has worked very hard on this committee – and I will not take that away from him. But why wouldn't you with pride, with humility, with honour bring that report, the interim report, forward into this Legislative Assembly so that we can all say, "Member for Redwater, you are on the right track, and you're doing wonderful work"? There's no reason, Madam Speaker, that that cannot occur and that that should not occur. Most importantly – and that is the reason that it's brought forward in this venue – it is because it is important information for Albertans to know, to have, to be able to attend the meetings, to be able to make informed discussions and decisions on the direction of long-term care in this province and in the future. This is the reason that it should be provided within this Legislative Assembly. There is no simpler reason than that.

There is no more important reason, Madam Speaker, than to provide that information to the citizens. That is the role of government. It is the role of government to be open. It is the role of government to be transparent. It is what this government keeps saying they pride themselves on. Yet over and over and over again we have seen instances where this government for whatever reason – and there are no reasons that are given that are logical.

[The Speaker in the chair]

So for whatever reason, they deny and deny and deny, and the denials become almost ridiculous. A denial at this point then becomes an argument of: there is no report. That seems to be the basis for the denial, that there is no report. It's a matter of discussion between the minister and the chair of the long-term care committee. But, as I've indicated before, then why in fact is it within the budget? Why is it stated that there is an interim report?

Now, the minister has got to come clean. We have heard much in this Legislative Assembly about coming clean. I believe that the minister at this point in time has to say, "There is no report, and the budget documents are misleading," or "There is a report, and I'm refusing to give it to you." For what reason? I cannot imagine, Mr. Speaker, what that reason in fact could be. There has been no indication from the minister, from the Member for Calgary-Montrose, from the Member for Redwater as to what in fact that reason could be.

The wording of the motion is very clear. It says "the report," and we know there is a report. So the comment that I make with regards to this is that because it is an item of great interest to Albertans, an item of vital interest to Albertans in all of our communities, this report should be public and this report should be there so that informed discussion can take place. Other than the minister wishing to hide the report because perhaps it shows the inadequacies within our system, there can be no other reason.

The reality is that we all know there are inadequacies in our system. We all know that there are individuals who cannot access long-term care in a timely fashion. We all know that there are individuals who are in acute care beds as opposed to being in long-term care beds, and that is an issue as well. So as long as we know that, there is no reason for the minister to hide that information, if that in fact is what he's attempting to do. That information is available from a wide variety of sources. That information is available and open. What is not available is what the recommendations are as to how we fix that particular problem. That is what is not available, Mr. Speaker, and that is what the Official Opposition in a responsible manner has been requesting and will continue to request until we get an answer as to what that report contains.

4:50

I hope that the minister has listened very attentively to the rationale behind this particular question. I hope that the Member for Redwater has listened as to the history and background and will perhaps check a little bit more closely as to what happened before he was elected to this Legislative Assembly so that in fact we can clear up any misconceptions and any misunderstandings with regards to the role and function of this long-term care advisory committee.

I hope that the chairs of the committees that are responsible for the issues and for individuals that need to access long-term care, like the Seniors Advisory Council, like the committee for individuals with disabilities, and any other committees that do in fact have some interaction with long-term care, would also ask that same question of the minister, would ask for the interim report that has been put

forward by the committee so that everyone in government and in this Legislative Assembly and all the citizens within this province, all the regional health authorities, the nongovernmental organizations, that would benefit from the knowledge that's provided within these documents, would be able access it, would be able to explore it, would be able to provide information and provide suggestions and make comments on this particular very important issue.

Hopefully, we have been able to convince the minister that this would be the appropriate step to take and that what we will see occur is that that information will be tabled within this Legislative Assembly by the Member for Redwater or by the minister himself, providing us and all those individuals who are actively involved in discussing the issue of long-term care around this province through their regional health authorities, through their community health councils, through various other organizations – Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired, the Council on Aging; the list goes on – with that information as well. That is common courtesy, Mr. Speaker. That is a recognition of the rights of citizens within this province to access information that is vital and that is important and that is of more than just interest to those individuals.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Highway Maintenance Privatization

M14. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mrs. Soetaert that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports and comparisons of the costs and/or benefits of the privatization of provincial highway maintenance and preservation completed between January 1, 1994, and February 16, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister of transportation I would like to move an amendment to Motion for a Return 14. The amendment will read:

copies of summary reports and comparisons of the costs and/or benefits of the outsourcing of primary highway maintenance completed since January 1, 1994.

Thus the new amended motion would read:

that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of summary reports and comparisons of the costs and/or benefits of the outsourcing of primary highway maintenance completed since January 1, 1994.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's motion asked for "all reports and comparisons" relating to costs and/or benefits of the privatization. This motion as submitted is so broad that it would be very time-consuming and costly to gather the required documents. Indeed, his department could have rejected this motion under *Beauchesne* 446(2)(g), but if this amendment is accepted, we would be, however, more than happy to share with the members of this Assembly summary reports on the cost benefit of primary highway outsourcing. Moreover, we are prepared to provide information more current than the February 16, 1999, date as noted in the hon. member's motion. That is why we are amending the motion to include summary reports only and to delete the cutoff date of February 16, 1999.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the

Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert one of my questions around this amendment is that the original wording was asking for "privatization," and the wording that is coming back through the amendment is "outsourcing." So one of my questions is: what is the definition of or what is the difference between privatization and outsourcing? Is "outsourcing" the government's word that is used where other people would use "privatization"? I guess I would like to know that.

Aside from a clarification around that wording, my instructions from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert are to accept the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert is indeed pleased with the co-operation that's been put forward by the minister of transportation and looks forward to receiving the information.

If at the same time I may ask on her behalf that the clarification around the wording "privatization" and "outsourcing" and the definitions of those two words as understood by the government could be included in some correspondence or with this motion for a return, I would appreciate that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion as amended carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M16. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of correspondence, memoranda, studies, and reports prepared by or for as well as sent to Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1994, to February 16, 1999, pertaining to financial transactions involving West Edmonton Mall Property Inc., Triple Five Corporation Ltd., Toronto Dominion Bank, Nomura Canada, Nomura Asset Capital Corporation, TD Trust Company, 606881 Alberta Ltd., 333856 Alberta Ltd., 218703 Alberta Ltd., 298936 Alberta Ltd., 342322 Alberta Ltd., the West Edmonton Mall, and Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, speaking to that motion. I can understand that the government is going to have some reluctance to probably comply with this motion, and I wouldn't anticipate that they would accept it fully. But possibly the minister may make an amendment and say: well there are certain ones of this that wouldn't be acceptable, numbered companies, whatever; however, as a sign of good faith we are prepared to release those documents that government may have prepared, for example for the Alberta Treasury, or that the government is aware of that Alberta Treasury may have prepared or documents that they may have prepared by any of these outside corporations that they may have.

5:00

The point of this particular motion for a return, Mr. Speaker, is it sort of gives us an opportunity to, again, attempt to point out the importance, to try and get out as much public information as possible on this whole issue so Albertans can judge for themselves as to what they deemed actually happened. This opposition has

called for a full public inquiry on this whole matter. This opposition has made it clear that we did have some hesitation with the report by the Auditor General, that certain aspects of it were incomplete and so on and so forth.

The government rejected the full public inquiry. The full public inquiry, of course, would have put the matter to bed once and for all. The option of waiting for the courts to resolve all the issues related to this particular transaction, we know, could go on for years. Already we've gotten an indication of the various manoeuvres that have been made by lawyers for the various parties that are part of this whole particular transaction.

The more documents that the government comes forward with and the more documents that the government is prepared to make public, then of course the more the public are in a position that they can themselves judge independently as to whether they're comfortable with everything that happened, as to whether they are of the opinion that there may have been some political influence or there may have been improper discussions or as to whether the loan was even improper or as to whether what type of communication may have happened between the Alberta Treasury Branch and the government.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's a very, very complex issue. It's one that's hung over as a dark cloud, hung over this particular Legislative Assembly for a number of months now. It's one that, obviously, the Premier of the province is not comfortable with. I'm sure the Premier would sooner that this whole matter was put to bed. But how do you put a matter like this to bed? To say, "Well, we're going to wait for the courts to resolve it"? We know that that's going to go on for months and months and months and years and years and years. Meanwhile that dark cloud kind of hangs over the head of the Legislative Assembly in terms of this particular transaction.

The full public inquiry, yes, that would have taken a period of time. It could have gone on for a number of months. In fact public inquiries in the past we've seen have gone on for more than a couple of months. They've gone on for a few months, if not years.

So bearing all that, what's the next best option? The next best option is to release documentation on the matter that can be released. Now, there is some information – we recognize that – where there are legitimate reasons for confidentiality, possibly because of a direct court action, whatever. But one can't simply say that any document pertaining to this whole transaction can't be made public. If the government were to show some attempt to start releasing some of the information, it would possibly satisfy members of the public that, yes, the government is serious about clearing the air on this particular matter and allowing the public to judge from there as to what was appropriate and what wasn't appropriate.

Now, there are a number of members of the House that I'm sure are going to respond to this particular motion. I'm sure that the minister will probably delight in responding, and hopefully when he does respond, he will give some indication that, yeah, there are certain aspects of this request which our Treasury critic has made in good faith, that some of the documents that he has asked for are legitimate and they can in fact be made public.

Now, on that particular point I'm going to conclude my initial remarks, and I'm going to allow others to carry on the debate. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member came this close to convincing me that we shouldn't reject this motion, but I've been requested by the Provincial Treasurer to do so, and the reasons are that the involvement of the Alberta Treasury Branches with refinancing of West Edmonton Mall was, as

noted by the hon. member, reviewed by the Auditor General in his report, which was released publicly last month. And contrary to what the hon. member has asserted, the Premier is very comfortable with the status of this issue at this time. As he also knows, this matter is subject to several legal actions, and it would be inappropriate to release any further information on these matters while they are before the courts. Quite frankly the government will not compromise its legal position. *Beauchesne* also supports this decision. I'd refer to 428. "A question . . . must not . . .

(p) be asked which might prejudice a pending trial in a Court of law.

Also, 446(2):

The following criteria are to be applied in determining if the government papers or documents should be exempt from production . . .

(m) Any proceedings before a court of justice or a judicial inquiry of any sort.

Therefore, we are urging rejection of this motion.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact remains that in the response by the Deputy Government House Leader the usual interpretation of those *Beauchesne* citations relates to matters of Criminal Code actions, not civil actions, that are pending trial, and we have ample proof of that in this Assembly in the past tense with respect to the various suits initiated by the provincial government against – oh well, we'll start with Gainers Inc., Pocklington financial group, and you name the linkages there, and you'll get them all, I'm sure. But the fact remains that in this House we were able to requisition copies of memoranda which had been distributed either to one or more departments or from one or more departments and either to any of those companies or from any of those companies with respect to moneys being owed to the taxpayers of Alberta. At no time in my recollection – and I was here for that period of time – was the sub judice rule imposed when it came to civil actions. So I suggest the primary reason that the Government House Leader is using for denying this motion is specious.

Now, to speak to the substance of the matter. [interjection] Pardon me?

MR. HAVELOCK: I'm the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS BARRETT: You're which?

AN HON. MEMBER: He's the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS BARRETT: Oh, pardon me. The Deputy Government House Leader. The Government House Leader, junior. Okay. I'll remember that. [interjection] Or the former Government House Leader.

Let us revert to the substance of the issue. The parameters of the Auditor General's inquiry into the matter that he did report on six weeks ago were quite limited in scope, limited to questions such as: was there unwarranted political interference or suggestions? That kind of questioning. He took depositions, admittedly, from some of the key players at the time and concluded that there was no unwarranted political interference in the transaction that resulted in the more than tripling of the legally mandated exposure of any Treasury Branch loan, number one.

Number two, the question as to whether or not the valuation of the refinancing provided to West Edmonton Mall was appropriate has never been addressed. Neither has any of the information regarding

the initial plan of Gentra's refinancing package been made available so that the public can know whether or not the ultimate transaction that occurred was appropriate.

5:10

Now, I'd just like to mention something about this company called Gentra. I won't repeat on the record how that company is referred to off the record, but it is a less than flattering phrase that is used. However, despite their business practices, Gentra at the time, and I believe continued to demonstrate that when they refinanced risky organizations – and remember that's the nature of their business; all right? They don't invest in blue chip; okay? They restructure financially risky operations, and despite what people will say about the company off the record, they have achieved success. And I will point out to you one example in this city alone, that being Londonderry Mall.

I haven't been there for a long time, but I understand that the ownership and refinancing of Londonderry has resulted in financially viable renovations which apparently make it the most visually attractive mall in the city. I don't like malls to begin with, but I would have guessed, for example, Heritage Mall might get that designation by business reporters in the know, but I have been told by business reporters in the know that in fact Londonderry Mall is visually the nicest looking mall now in this town.

So I say: now, if Gentra could do that, then why would Gentra's combined offer with another noteworthy financial institution have been scuttled, and why would the Treasury Branch go out of its way to take on – and remember; the maximum loan that the Treasury Branch was mandated to give out at the time was \$100 million. Why they would go out on a limb and refinance West Edmonton Mall or its successor names and company names and numbers is beyond me, unless there was some greater political suggestion than that which we already know about, and this is the purpose of this motion for a return.

Admittedly, it casts an extremely wide net, but as the mover of the motion, today, anyway, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, pointed out, I believe this Chamber has demonstrated amply this afternoon that where governments are prepared to come forward with reasonable amendments, the opposition is more than prepared to accept them. And that would have been the case in Motion for a Return 16.

You know, if the government wanted to argue that for the purposes of protection of future business transactions any items, say any memoranda dated after 1997, for example, well after the loan refinancing had been conducted, would be off the record and out of scope, I think I could have gone along with that and said fine. But you know you don't hurt business retroactively, generally speaking, and I don't think that anybody here is out to hurt the Treasury Branch. I certainly am not. In fact, I seem to be one of the only two advocates in the entire Chamber that wishes to retain the Treasury Branch as a publicly owned and operated institution.

MR. WICKMAN: Who's the other one?

MS BARRETT: The Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. [interjection] There are more then? Others? I've got more company on this than I thought. Well, I'm pleased to hear that.

In any event, having stated my motives, it is clear that I for one in supporting this motion for a return have no intention of poking anybody's eye when it comes to the Treasury Branches operation. Obviously, what's really being pursued here is the ability to connect the dots. And without certain information members of this Assembly, on behalf of the people who elected us, are rendered incapable

of doing that job. As the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford pointed out, civil actions can take a long time.

Now, we know that the Code inquiry into the collapse of the Principal Group, which was the last of them anyway – we should have had an inquiry long before the Principal Group had the plug pulled on them. I can't remember how many trust companies were put out of business by the Getty government before then. I know one thing, the cost to the taxpayers topped a billion dollars when all was said and done after all of those collapses.

In any event, the point that was being made by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford could not be better illustrated than by my returning to the Gainers issue. Do you realize, Mr. Speaker, that it was fully 10 years between the time the Getty government first initiated a civil action involving an issue of money and the time that the first of the civil actions actually got to trial? Ten years. And the amount of money involved was considerably less. I believe around \$76 million.

Speaker's Ruling Relevance

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, with the greatest degree of kindness, relevancy is important in these items. Motion for a Return 16 is very, very specific. I can cite the Standing Orders; I can cite *Beauchesne* 459. There's nothing in Motion for a Return 16 that relates to Londonderry Mall, Heritage Mall, some other firm, or the last item. So perhaps the hon. member might return to the question and the point at hand.

Debate Continued

MS BARRETT: As I was illustrating the point, when it takes 10 years for a civil action of a monetary value significantly less than the monetary issue in front of us with respect to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, I could easily speculate – and I wouldn't want to talk about football field sizes or anything, Mr. Speaker – that when we're to use a measuring stick of \$67 million versus \$435 million between Gainers and the West Edmonton Mall issue and the 10 years getting to the first trial for the Gainers civil action and the West Edmonton Mall, I could easily extrapolate that it could take 40 years; couldn't I, Mr. Speaker?

And that's where I'm a-headed. That's where I'm a-headed. [interjection] Pardon me?

DR. TAYLOR: It guarantees a job. Lawyers have got to be in business.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, please. Via the chair.

MS BARRETT: But you wouldn't want me to do that, because you wouldn't want me to exaggerate anything and chew up the clock. I can remember in the old days, when I was here before, seeing a handful of ministers doing that and how, really, it was very rough on the members of the Assembly, so I wouldn't want to push that envelope.

However, I would like to say that this is a mess that needs to be cleaned up, and if the government isn't prepared to take it to a public inquiry, the government should at least release all of the information that it has in its possession and that it is able to gain into its possession by virtue of its relationship to the Treasury Branch. I admit that you cannot go directly from government to West Edmonton Mall and tell them what to do without going through a civil action, but you certainly can through an agency of the Crown, that being the Treasury Branches, and let it all come to light. Or should I ask

rhetorically: are they scared of losing government over this? I think so.

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

MS OLSEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise in support of this motion. I've heard the debate of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, and there's certainly some legitimacy to this. What this particular motion for a return is asking for is "correspondence, memoranda, studies, and reports prepared by or for as well as sent to Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1994, to February 16, 1999, pertaining to" something very specific, and that's the "financial transactions involving West Edmonton Mall . . . Triple Five," and the list goes on. They've all been named.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that there's some sensitivity to this issue. There are a number of documents flying back and forth between some of these companies and their lawyers and the courts, and every week we find out new information that's been tabled in the courts and that becomes publicly accessible.

One of the problems we're having is that we're not getting the information that Albertans deserve in their correspondence from the government's side of it, from Alberta Treasury's side and Alberta Treasury's interactions. So as much as it's great to be able glean the information out of those documents that are being presented in the courtrooms, we're not getting it here.

5:20

I think the most significant factor in this is that civil litigation takes years to wind its way through the court processes. You know, we've heard that a million times walking through the justice summit: the time it takes, the access, the perceived games played by both sides. So what happens is that it really slows down the ability for people to find out what has actually happened in a given situation. Albertans need to know. We need to know if there was a study done on the commercial value of the mall and what the government was actually doing and what their role was in the whole issue.

In fact, you know, I've commented time and time again that it seems to me that if the government is satisfied that their role was up front and on the line and the Auditor General said, "Look; there's no political interference" and those kinds of things, then I can't quite get my head around the fact, then, that the documents that could be released and should be released to Albertans are not being released. It brings me back to one of those questions: why not? I mean, if you have nothing to hide, put the information on the table and let us go through it. What is the problem if we do that?

I think red flags get raised somewhat, Mr. Speaker, when information that should be available to Albertans and should be available to this Assembly so that everybody in this Assembly knows what's going on – we all were elected at different times. We all have different histories in this Assembly, and we all need to be able to understand what's going on.

I understand the concern of the Minister of Justice about information which might prejudice a trial in a court of law. I think that we're certainly not talking at this point anyway about criminal charges here. We're talking about civil litigation where the . . .

MR. HAVELOCK: There's a criminal investigation ongoing.

MS OLSEN: Well, the minister says that there's a criminal investigation that's ongoing. I said that at this point we're not talking about criminal charges. That investigation, given the state of the fraud units in this province and the lack of manpower to deal

with these complex issues, Mr. Speaker – it takes a long time to investigate those particular incidents, never mind then taking it to the Crown's office and then moving forward in that respect.

So, Mr. Speaker, I understand the sub judice question. I'm not satisfied that it holds in every aspect or every instance in this particular case, and in fact I would suggest that there's probably documentation that can be used. In fact I would even speculate that the 16-page affidavit that was made by the Premier should now be available and could be available. He's got nothing to hide; he's got nothing to be concerned about. That's what's sort of bothering me, because I sit back and I say: if you have nothing to hide, if you have nothing to be afraid of, if your particular involvement was all up front and all on the table, then what are you doing not releasing the information?

I'm just wondering if the hon. Treasurer at some time could explain to us why all of these particular documents aren't available for release. You know, we look at the report on the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall. Certainly there are some documents that we would like to see released. Whether they're of a limited scope or not, I would like to see these documents on the table. I'd like to see this government not hide behind sub judice, not hide behind freedom of information, not hide behind all of these tools. I'd like to see them come up front with the information. I see absolutely no reason for not doing that.

You know, at some point it may end up being more embarrassing for the government if they're required to bring these documents into another environment, through a different process, and that may in fact be the courts. At that point if there's something that's a little shady, if you will, then that's where the government suffers the embarrassment. At this point the Auditor General has said: don't worry; don't worry, government of Alberta; you have nothing to

hide. So let's put it on the table.

At this point, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to adjourn debate on this motion.

THE SPEAKER: Well, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood has moved that we can adjourn the debate on this motion. All those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House now stand adjourned until 8 this evening, when it shall reconvene in Committee of Supply.

THE SPEAKER: Having heard the motion put forward by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, will all those members in favour please say aye?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:28 p.m.]