

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, March 31, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/03/31

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. The prayer today is condensed from one that is said in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

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

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a gentleman seated in your gallery this afternoon, accompanied by other guests as well, a gentleman that to many Albertans is really a man of vision, a builder who many years ago together with Dr. Hugh Horner helped build the largest rural gas distribution centre anywhere in the world, and it's right here in Alberta. That same vision was also applied to the electrical power and telephone lines and gas, and there's no other place in the world with those same amenities. That gentleman is Mr. Henry Tomlinson, who recently announced his retirement as manager of the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops, and we certainly wish that he is blessed with good health and a happy retirement. Accompanying him today is the new general manager, Mr. Mike Heck, and his associates, Mr. Ed Keef, Ms Lois Westacott. I don't see Murray up there. I'd ask everyone to give our guests a very traditional warm welcome. Please rise.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I present a petition signed by a number of Edmontonians, an SOS petition urging

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

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to submit a petition on behalf of 105 people from Lethbridge. They're requesting

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

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to present two tablings today of the SOS petition urging the Government to increase funding of children in our public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

One is 105 names from Stony Plain and Spruce Grove, and the other one is 77 names from the constituency of Edmonton-Manning.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 177 residents of the Parkland school division 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.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 24 Traffic Safety Act

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and introduce Bill 24, the Traffic Safety Act, 1999.

This act will provide Albertans and the law enforcement community with one-window access for matters concerning drivers, vehicles, and road safety. Alberta will be the first province to have one act governing licensing and traffic safety issues. Some of the key changes being brought forward in this act include the administrative licence suspension program for those charged with impaired driving and graduated licensing for learners. The act will also provide enabling legislation to deal by regulation with issues such as bicycle helmets and riding in the back of pickups.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be able to introduce this very important piece of legislation, which I feel will give Albertans modernized legislation that reflects this government's commitment to road safety.

[Leave granted; Bill 24 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling responses to questions which were raised March 22 in Committee of Supply related to the Treasury Department budget estimates. I don't have all the answers to all the questions yet, but that's the first installment on a number of questions, good questions, that were posed by the opposition.

I'm also tabling, Mr. Speaker, results of a poll done by Focus Alberta that shows the satisfaction rating for this year's budget among Albertans was 86 percent.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Legislative Assembly copies of a news release announcing details for the community lottery board grant program for the 1999-2000 fiscal year. I should also inform members that attached to that, which will be of interest to them, is the listing of what grant funding and administrative funding will be available for each of the lottery boards.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I filed a news release indicating a \$2 billion project of Suncor in the north. Today I'm filing five copies of a news release that announces a new cogeneration plant with TransAlta and Suncor worth \$315 million. It's new generation and will bring 220 megawatts on this fall, as well as a total capacity

of 360 megawatts by the year 2001. This is new and above the 2,100 megawatts on application today. This is a very significant advancement of the electrical power grid of the province of Alberta.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table in the Assembly five copies of the Province-Wide Services 1998 Annual Report on Activities and Outcomes in the health care system.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table today with the Assembly five copies of the report of the Bill 37 review panel. Copies have also been provided to all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today to file with the Assembly five copies of *Our Voice*, the spare change magazine written by, for, and about inner-city residents on the occasion of their fifth anniversary of publication.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to table with the Assembly responses to the questions that were raised during the main estimates of Economic Development on March 23. I believe all questions have been answered.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I am also tabling the responses to the over 30 questions that were handed to me by the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of the program of the celebration of Eid al-Adha that was held in the Legislature rotunda yesterday. It is a celebration by the Muslims, and it is to celebrate the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in the Assembly to table nonidentifying information on seven AISH millionaires. In tabling this, I'm also asking for a written apology from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for her statements in the media.

1:40

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table with the Assembly the appropriate number of copies of a letter exchange between Dr. Michael Percy when he was the MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud and Mr. Jim Dinning when he was the Provincial Treasurer dated February 3, 1995, regarding the joint venture agreement between the province of Alberta and ISM which has to do with the ownership of PSC.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings to make. The first one is a copy of a letter that I understand every other member of the Assembly has also received from the Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists. This letter expresses some concerns about Bill 18 along with the association's wish for separate governing legislation.

I have two from perhaps literally hundreds of letters that are being

sent to the government concerning Bill 20. In these letters Albertans are expressing concern about an absence of consultation with the teachers of this province with respect to the abolition of the Board of Reference. I'm tabling only two in the interests of saving both paper and our trees.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table this afternoon five copies of a letter dated today from myself to the hon. Minister of Economic Development requesting more information on the tests that are being conducted in Whitecourt on the durability of the treated pine shake.

Thank you.

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

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings this afternoon. The first is from a constituent of mine, Val Benoit, who is a member of the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group. She is requesting that there be a resolution to the issue of the WCB widows' pension.

My next tabling is a letter from the United Nurses of Alberta to the assistant registrar of the College of Physicians and Surgeons wherein they indicate their comments on the proposed standards for long-stay nonhospital surgical facilities and request that the college look at their previous motions and abide by those motions.

My third tabling is the minutes of the council meeting of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of February 5, 1999, wherein they discuss the draft accreditation standards for long-stay nonhospital surgical facilities.

Thank you.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As co-chair of the provincial/municipal Task Force on Homelessness in Edmonton I am pleased to table four copies of the notice that has appeared and will appear again in local papers regarding the public forum on homelessness that will occur on Friday, April 9 on the 6th floor of the Stanley Milner library here in Edmonton. This is an excellent opportunity for Albertans as individuals or as organizations who are concerned about homelessness to come and express their views directly to our task force.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly five copies which are the response to a question asked by the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East during Oral Question Period on Monday, March 29, 1999. This tabling is in response to the hon. member's request for information on the projects funded under the regional response improvement program for '99-2000. This response provides a breakdown of the recipients, the types of projects, the grant moneys that were allocated, and some background information for the selection process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Introduction of Guests

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of introducing 32 grade 10 students from Rundle College who are accompanied by Mr. Aaron Goettel and Mr. David McWhinnie. I request that they rise and that this House give them a traditional warm welcome.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a very special introduction that I would like to make to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly. This is a young woman on her first visit to the Legislative Assembly, and it's a special occasion for me because she is the daughter of one of my colleagues, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview. So I would ask Sarah Sloan to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to rise today to introduce yet another national championship team from the University of Alberta. With us today are the University of Alberta Pandas women's basketball team, who a couple of weeks ago won their first national basketball championship. With us today are Canada West coach of the year, Trix Baker, Robyn Haig from Airdrie, Cathy Butlin from Edmonton, Jackie Simon from Sherwood Park, Kim Wyley from Edmonton, Kristy Wiebe from Ardrossan, Amanda Smith from Edmonton, Rania Burns from Tofield, Marianne Radmanovich from Edmonton, and Jessica Staniszewski from Edmonton. If they would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome. Congratulations, ladies.

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

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two very active Calgarians, Anne Stalker, the president of the University of Calgary faculty association, and Don Kozak, professional officer of the faculty association. I believe that they are seated in the public gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly Mr. Nigel Gates, who's seated in the public gallery. Nigel's been an outstanding advocate around mental health issues and improved access to mental health services in the Calgary region. I'd invite Nigel to stand and receive the customary welcome of members of the Assembly.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure today to introduce to you and to members of the Assembly the new editor of the publication known as *Our Voice* magazine. He is Michael Walters. He's seated in the public gallery along with the volunteer proofreader, Kara Dublenko. We had planned that Keith Wiley, the outgoing editor of *Our Voice* would be here today, but that wasn't possible. Nonetheless I'd ask the two guests here representing *Our Voice* to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have the distinct pleasure today to rise and recognize a registered nurse who is also very politically active in the constituency of Edmonton-Riverview. I would ask Debbie Kiraly and her daughter to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and introduce seven key people who came together to lead the

development of the Traffic Safety Act. While there are a number of other staff in the department and others who have contributed significantly, these were the key people. I'd like at this time to introduce Sergeant Garry Meads of the Edmonton city police traffic section; Constable Greg Srogen, RCMP Stony Plain highway department; Gary Boddez, assistant deputy minister, traffic safety division; Tom Hong, executive director of business management; Joanne Van de Maat, director, legislative planning; Ron Smitten, manager of traffic safety co-ordination; and Marilyn Zukowski, legislative assistant.

I'd also like to acknowledge the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police, the RCMP, and the Edmonton Police Service for providing the department with Sergeant Meads and Constable Srogen on a secondment basis. I'd also like to acknowledge Richard Larson, legislative counsel during this long and lengthy process. I would ask that these individuals please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

1:50

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

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce a constituent and also a past president of the Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists. I'd like to ask Glen Horne to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to introduce a young grade 10 student from Archbishop MacDonald high school. Ken Seto is a resident of the Edmonton-McClung constituency who is representing Edmonton-McClung in the Alberta youth parliament. Ken is active in air cadets, the speech and debate club, the speaker's forum committee at his school, is a member of the student council, and does peer tutoring. Ken will be part of the *Reach for the Top* team next year. A very busy young man. I would ask all members to join in welcoming him to the Legislature.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a young lady who attends Victoria high school, a grade 10 student, Mary-Pat Schlosser. Mary-Pat is representing the riding of Edmonton-Rutherford in the forthcoming Alberta youth parliament. I would ask all Members of the Legislative Assembly to give her a very, very warm welcome as she rises to acknowledge our applause.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you some friends I see in the gallery today. It's their spring break. Brent and Dolores Andressen are here with their two daughters, and I'm sure they're here to watch the proceedings of the Legislature. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Health Legislation Review

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The report released today

by the blue-ribbon panel clearly stated that this government has failed in its attempt to protect the public health care system. The recommendations of the panel highlight the omissions from this government's previous legislation. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier now bring forward legislation which would ban private, for-profit hospitals in this province once and for all?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, not only are her assertions nonsense; they are completely false. Now, I'm not calling her a liar, but, you know, they are false, absolutely false. Not true.

I'm going to read from the report. It says, "The Panel could find no evidence to support the allegations" -- those allegations coming from that side -- "that Bill 37 offended the principles of the Canada Health Act." And this is most important, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry; I didn't mean to point at her. I should be pointing that way and speaking to you. "And fourth, the Bill did attempt to protect the public health system, but we found its approach could have been strengthened." Fair comments, but it says, "The Bill did attempt to protect the public health system."

Her assertions are wrong and false, and she should apologize.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the government respond to each of the panel's recommendations so that Albertans can be clear on this government's real intentions when it comes to health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, our real intentions when it comes to health care are to provide a good system, a system that's there for people when they need it.

Relative to the question, the report has been released in its entirety today, and I want to make a little mention of that, because I was listening to my speaker relative to some comments that were being made with respect to my estimates. It was suggested by the hon. leader of the New Democrats that perhaps some spin doctoring was going on and some laundering was being done. That is absolutely untrue. This report is the report that was prepared by the blue-ribbon panel. This is the report in its entirety.

As to the process we will follow from here on in, Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister reply.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly the report is a very important document. It has been made available to all members of the Assembly. It will be disseminated widely in the province, be available certainly from my office, on the Internet or web site or whatever it's called these days.

There will be an invitation to all Albertans, be they making a presentation from the point of view of an organization or stakeholder group or -- and I think this is very important -- from their own point of view as individual Albertans. We will take at least a month to assess the response. If it is still very, very much a matter that we are receiving input on, we could perhaps extend that further, but we want to hear about Albertans' assessment of this particular report.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the government judges Albertans' input as "inaccurate and simplistic" -- it's in their own news release -- why should Albertans trust that this government won't criticize their opinions again?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this government has a tremendous reputation for listening to Albertans and acting on their recommendations.

I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, it's a government that is far more open, far more accessible, and far more responsible to the feelings and the input of the people than the government that the hon. member

served, and I know because I was in that government. This is a much more open and responsive government. You know, when this hon. leader of the Liberal opposition was one of the ministers, one of the greatest complaints that I received as the minister of the environment was that no one could get in to see her.

Support for Rural Areas

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, while the government may be 10 years ahead of its debt plan, our rural municipalities are five years behind in facing a massive infrastructure deficit created by this government's policies of downloading and off-loading. At its annual spring convention just concluded at noon today here in Edmonton, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties is pointing out the toll that the provincial government is taking on rural communities and services in rural Alberta across the province. My questions are to the Premier. With the 200 to 250 schools on the closure list right across the province how many rural communities will be losing their schools?

MR. MAR: Tell the truth.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I hear my hon. colleague the Minister of Education saying that it's not true. I'll have him supplement.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity today -- and it was a wonderful opportunity -- to arrive early, to sit down and listen to the panel chaired by our hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs. A number of ministers were up front taking questions, fielding questions, tough questions. I didn't see the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition up there. The questions were reasonable. I sensed that there was a spirit of co-operation amongst the municipal leaders of municipal districts and counties.

2:00

I had the opportunity of delivering the closing speech. I said: yes, there are problems. I said that we're getting pressured to spend more and more and more. [interjections] Well, we get the pressure to spend . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Yeah, while they're going into debt.

MR. KLEIN: Well, we're spending \$600 million more on education. They want us to spend even more than that. They won't say how much.

Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated that we put \$140 million last year into infrastructure, \$130 million this year, \$150 million next year, and \$150 million the year after that. I indicated to the AAMDC that there is a task force in place. The AAMDC is a member of that task force, and hopefully within the next month or so we'll have recommendations for long-term sustainable solutions to some of these problems that I pointed out are related to growth.

Many, many provinces would like to have those problems, but as I also pointed out, when 55,000 people move to this province, Mr. Speaker -- and the Treasurer alluded to it as well -- they don't bring with them their roads, and their hospitals, and their schools, and all the infrastructure that goes along with it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, when is the government going to meet the long-term care needs of rural Albertans living in towns and villages rather than shipping them miles away from family, from friends, and from places of worship?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you for sure that that was

an issue that was never addressed by the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition when she was Minister of Health, but I'll tell you that this Minister of Health is doing a lot relative to seniors in conjunction with other ministries that also have responsibilities for seniors. I will have the hon. Minister of Health respond, followed by the hon. Minister of Community Development, followed by the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition may recall that in our overall budget and business plan, which has been discussed in committee, we have put an emphasis on long-term care starting with identified dollars to expand the long-term care capacity in Edmonton and Calgary specifically, and that will of course respond to the needs of our senior population but also help with the opening up of more acute care beds as being available for other necessary treatments.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have the long-term care review committee conducting its work and looking at not only the overall need out there for long-term care accommodation but also some very creative and innovative ways of providing that particular long-term care expansion.

In addition to that as we have capital dollars available, Mr. Speaker, long-term care will be certainly given priority.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When is the government going to ensure the safety of our rural communities by restoring the \$16 million in funding that it cut away from rural policing?

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, we used to, it's true, fund all police forces in the province to the tune of \$30 million. That funding was decreased to \$15 million a number of years ago, I think it was in 1993.

MR. KLEIN: To fight deficits.

MR. HAVELOCK: To fight the deficit, as the Premier indicates. That total reduction in the police services budget was actually spread over time, and I think it equated to about a 3 to 4 percent decrease in funding. One thing I will indicate, Mr. Speaker, is that for the past number of years for the . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. members. Yesterday was so pleasant in here; today is so different. I guess there's an ebb and flow that goes with these things. It must be something to do with the blue moon.

Hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General, you still have the floor.

Support for Rural Areas (continued)

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I'm trying to get to the point if the other side would just be quiet for a moment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What we have done in the past number of years, Mr. Speaker, is actually maintain the level of funding with respect to the provincial police force. We retain the services of the RCMP to provide communities with policing services. The hon. member across the way, the Leader of the Opposition, is probably well aware that all communities with less than 2,500 residents do not pay anything towards their policing costs. Other communities that have more residents of course do pay.

The other thing that we do, quite frankly, which provides a significant amount of support to communities is that all provincial fine revenues actually accrue to the communities which generate them. We handle all the costs associated with actually processing those fines. In fact this morning I saw some of the numbers, and it's approximately \$44 million to \$45 million dollars that stays within the communities on top of the \$15 million that we give them at this point in time.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Technology in Schools

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To date I've received over 50 letters from school board representatives, teachers, parents, and students in Lethbridge, Coalhurst, Coaldale, Pincher Creek, Taber, and Picture Butte. These Albertans are concerned about the rapidly approaching deadline for the provincially mandated learner outcomes in technology and the fact that the government is not providing its schools with the means to meet the deadlines. My question is to the Premier. Even with the new budget, schools are struggling to limit class sizes, hold the line on fund-raising, and pay teachers properly. Where are schools to get the money for technology hardware, software, and training that the government says has to be in place by September 2000?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, on top of the additional moneys that have been put into the system over the past two years, an additional \$600 million was put in this year. [interjections] There was an additional \$600 million put in this year.

AN HON. MEMBER: Not this year, Ralph.

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry. Over the next three years. My apologies. Right. Okay. Fine. I give them one. Over the next three years, Mr. Speaker.

The Department of Education has done a tremendous amount of research into this matter. The minister and his officials have been talking to teachers and administrators and members of school councils throughout the province. As a matter of fact, I believe it was Bauni Mackay who said that she was absolutely delighted to get something in the area that would average 3 percent. Well, this is a 19 percent average. [interjection] No. This is 19 percent over the three years. If you average it out, that's a little over 6 percent for each of those years, Mr. Speaker. That is a significant increase in funding understanding that when the cuts first began Education was the department that withstood the least amount in provincial government spending.

Relative to the situation specific to the Lethbridge area, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, perhaps just a couple of points that I'd like to add to what the Premier has already indicated. We have extended our \$20 million for technology that we've been doing in previous years. The extension of that has been greeted with a great deal of warmth by school boards.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we've continued our partnership with Telus, the Telus Learning Connection, that provides a partnership arrangement between and among a number of partners, corporate and school boards and government, to provide teacher training in the use of technology.

I would be remiss if I didn't point out that the basic instructional

grant rate going up by 3 percent, 2 percent, and 2 percent over the next three years will result ultimately, Mr. Speaker, in a classroom size of 26, as an example, a basic instructional grant equal to \$100,000. Actually over \$100,000. I don't think anybody thinks that's an insignificant amount of money that would be allocated just for the instruction of a classroom of 26. In addition to that of course there's money for administration and transportation, operations and maintenance.

So the combination of an increase in the basic instructional grant rate plus the additional top-ups that we have in the area of technology and in teacher training should help schools and school boards deal with the technology outcomes that we expect out of our schools.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, interestingly, we are the first province in all of Canada to have technology outcomes as part of our curriculum. I think that that has been really looked upon with a great deal of envy by other provinces.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that the \$20 million is distributed over the 575,000 students in the province, what sort of outcome does the government expect with an allotment of only \$35 per student?

2:10

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've already indicated that the basic instructional grant rate is going to over \$4,000 per student per year by the year 2001, so to suggest that it's just \$35 that would be applied towards technology would not be correct. School boards themselves receive the money in the instructional block grant, and as I indicated, for a classroom size of 26 that would be \$100,000. Money from that would go to paying for teachers, purchasing text books, purchasing technology. It would be a decision of a local school board to decide how to allocate that \$100,000 for those 26 students in terms of teacher resources, technology, or other types of learning resources.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question again is, I guess, to the Minister of Education. Why did Budget '99 not provide specific funds within Education's core funding to assist schools in meeting mandated deadlines either for technology or for new curriculum changes? These are not core-based funded items.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is always a constant matter of discussion between the Minister of Education and the Department of Education with school boards. On the one hand, school boards would say: we know best what our local needs are, what our local priorities are, and accordingly you should just grant the money without strings attached to it, and we'll know how to apply those dollars to meet our own local needs and expectations.

Well, by and large that's what we do. We give school boards instructional grants without strings. We do say that administration costs must be capped at 4 to 6 percent of our grants. We do have some grants which are restricted to certain areas such as in the area of capital or in transportation. But, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the basic instructional grant, we don't allocate specifically for curriculum; we don't allocate specifically for things like textbooks. We do rely upon the good judgment of school boards because that's what school boards have asked for.

Private Hospitals

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, for over a year the government hid behind the smoke screen caused by Bill 37 and its deliberate

obfuscation of the issue that it was attempting to hide. Rather than call it a hospital, which is what it was really about, the government was using new language like nonhospital surgical facilities and private treatment facilities. But the one good thing that came out of the Bill 37 review panel is that they caught the government. They said: hey, if you're talking about a hospital, you'd better call it a private hospital. My first question to the Premier is this: does he or the government believe that Alberta has a need for private, for-profit hospitals? And if yes, why?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, what this province has is a need to protect, preserve, defend, and fight for the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier refused to answer that question, could I ask a more direct one: why is it that the government refuses to introduce legislation which would ban private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I want to know, Mr. Speaker, what is precisely -- and perhaps the hon. member will describe for me: what precisely is a private, for-profit hospital? Could she please? [interjection] And maybe the Liberals would please give me a description. Is it an MRI clinic? Is it a private MRI clinic? I know that the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition would be familiar with that, because I believe one of her relatives runs one. Is it that kind of operation she's talking about? What is a private, for-profit hospital? Describe it.

MS BARRETT: I think I can, Mr. Speaker. A private, for-profit hospital would be a surgical facility that allows overnight stays and provides insured health care services. [interjections] He asked me to answer the question, so I did.

Mr. Speaker, I do have a question.

THE SPEAKER: Whoa. It doesn't work that way. If hon. members want to rise to the debate in terms of questions and answers, there's another part of the routine where that can happen.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain, then, if he wasn't listening to the people at the health summit in February, or is he just going to outright ignore the recommendations that came from an overwhelming majority of the participants who said: we want our public health care system, and no private, for-profit hospitals? Which is it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think there are provisions for private, for-profit hospitals. Now, there are situations, as I understand it, where space in publicly funded hospitals is taken up by people who want, for instance, purely cosmetic surgery for pure vanity purposes. Is the hon. member saying that that ought not take place in a private clinic? I don't know. These are some of the problems we're grappling with. Should that person for strictly vanity reasons occupy bed space that could be better occupied by someone who's truly sick or injured? You know, those are the kinds of things that we're grappling with.

When it comes to health care in the conventional sense -- in other words, when you're sick, and you're banged up, and you have to go to a hospital -- no, there never will be such a thing as a private, for-profit hospital. Never will be. It can't happen.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Cultural Diversity and Human Rights

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently a survey was conducted by the University of Calgary in conjunction with the *Calgary Herald*. This study found that the majority of Albertans indeed are tolerant of cultural diversity and most supportive of human rights protection. I, along with several of my constituents, thought the survey findings were positive. In fact as one of my constituents said: this survey result should go a long way in ensuring that we are no longer labeled a redneck province. My questions today are for the Minister of Community Development. Could the minister please explain whether the findings of this survey in fact concur with her understanding of the level of tolerance in Alberta and thus are in keeping with the principles involved in our human rights legislation?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I haven't had an opportunity to review the study in its entirety. However, I have looked at some of the major findings. From what I've seen, the study strongly demonstrates that Albertans are tolerant, that they embrace cultural diversity and have a very high regard for the importance of human rights protection. I think it also shows that the myth of redneck Alberta is just exactly that. It is a myth. I think the strength of the human rights legislation and the effectiveness of the commission go a long ways to ensure that human rights in this province are protected.

There are two points I'd like to make, Mr. Speaker. For example, the commission determined that 89 percent of Albertans consider that the commission plays an important role in the protection of human rights in this province. I think another indicator of the high degree of tolerance in this province is the sharp decrease in the proportion of human rights complaints related to racial discrimination. In the early 1980s racial discrimination cases made up about 36 percent of the human rights complaints. Last year that number was down to 9 percent. I think that speaks to the strength of this province.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, could the minister outline what exactly the government is planning to do in the long term to ensure that human rights and tolerance continues in a positive manner in Alberta?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first and foremost this government will continue to support the work of the Human Rights Commission in this province and the department staff who support that commission. In the past year or so the Human Rights Commission themselves have produced two educational videos. They've worked with aboriginal communities on a human rights resource kit. They've cosponsored poster and essay contests. These are just a few examples of what is happening.

2:20

I would also mention, Mr. Speaker, the work that's being achieved by the human rights, citizenship, and multiculturalism education fund, which is chaired by the Member for Calgary-Cross, which has provided \$1.1 million on an annual basis to assist communities to address this issue in their own community in the most appropriate way.

MRS. GORDON: Mr. Speaker, could the minister explain: what is the Cultural Diversity Institute, who are the individuals involved, and what exactly is its mandate?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, that's a very large question.

Perhaps some of it I will respond to in writing to the member.

I would say that the Cultural Diversity Institute is a co-operative project by the University of Calgary and the Department of Community Development. It works with a variety of client groups to make awareness of human rights a priority and how to make human rights protection in their companies a priority. It provides education, training, information, and research.

Mr. Speaker, I will, as I indicated, prepare a memo to the hon. member to give her the full detail of the makeup of that very important institute and the work that it is doing.

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

Support for Rural Areas

(continued)

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past five years this government made a deliberate choice to use \$7 billion in accumulated surpluses to accelerate the repayment of its debt while reducing its commitment to local communities by nearly \$400 million. Not only is this government underfunding our municipalities; its policies are tearing at the fabric of the family throughout rural Alberta. My question is to the Premier. Is this government considering accepting its responsibility to fully fund secondary highway construction rather than passing off 25 percent of the cost onto cash-strapped rural communities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, \$140 million last year, \$150 million this year, \$150 million next year, \$150 million the year after that. Add to that the numerous programs that we've put in under agriculture, under industrial wastewater management. We have reinvested significantly, and we will reinvest more once the officials have finished their work relative to the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure, and we will have in place a sustainable, long-term program.

Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that this is over and above what this government has already committed to Canamex, which tremendously enhances the economic opportunities for rural communities. That marvelous north/south corridor links up with highway I15 in the U.S. and creates a trade corridor all the way from the B.C. border in northwestern Alberta to the Mexican border and perhaps even through Mexico. You know, that's an \$800 million program. That's on top of the additional money that we've already committed. So I think that we're doing more than our level best to accommodate rural Alberta.

I didn't sense any animosity; I didn't sense resentment there today. Mr. Speaker, I did sense amongst the delegates -- and most of them voted for us by the way and will continue to vote for us -- that they want to work with the government in a spirit of co-operation. That's how we want to work with the urban municipalities, and we have given them that commitment.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, my next question is to the Premier also. Why is this government forcing rural municipalities to underfund local programs and services by grabbing off \$105 million more in educational property tax from residential ratepayers and farm properties?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that whole situation is under review as we speak, and I think the hon. member knows that.

I'll have the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs supplement.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I think quite clearly the community funding framework review that was implicit in the announcement

last year for \$140 million for infrastructure was stated. I think there have been numerous areas where my colleagues in Executive Council have added dollars, including moneys to fight organized crime in communities, including moneys to ensure that we put the resources in the right place to serve needy Albertans through housing.

Mr. Speaker, we are providing for communities \$87.9 million through housing management bodies to serve seniors, modest- and low-income individuals, and there was lottery funding as well that was committed in the past year to serve the homeless. So there are numerous areas which don't fit in any tidy one budget of government but fit in every budget of government where we're doing things for Albertans that we're responsible to do that are right there on the front lines and are committing to a higher quality of life in our communities.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, my third question is to the Premier. When is the government going to reverse the local infrastructure deficit to provide stable and predictable and long-term funding for rural municipalities so they can adequately meet the needs of the people within their communities?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times I have to put this on the record. We are doing precisely what the hon. member asked for. I have said so many times in this Legislature and repeated it today at the meeting of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties that last May the mayor of Calgary, the mayor of Edmonton, the president of the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the executive director of the Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, numerous ministers, and myself got together, and we agreed that there was an urgent problem. Shortly after that the officials came back and said: to fix and to look after the pressure points, we will need approximately \$600 million over the next four years. That was done. That commitment was given. The first amount was paid last year. The next amount will be paid this year and in the following two years.

We also said that that doesn't address the long-term sustainable needs. We sent our officials to work on a formula that would provide the security that the hon. member alludes to. Mr. Speaker, we're working on that right now. We expect that the officials will report within the next month to six weeks. At least that's the information I get. At that time we'll bring all the elected people together once again, and we will form together, collectively and in a co-operative manner, policy that will provide for sustainable infrastructure funding.

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

Hazardous Materials in the Workplace

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier last week there was a health research report released in Toronto about health hazards and the damage to pregnant workers and unborn children caused by workplace pollutant exposure, specifically chemicals. My question is to the Minister of Labour. Could the minister give an assessment of the situation in Alberta workplaces?

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The report that the hon. member refers to is the Mother Risk program at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. The medical study compared 125 pregnant women exposed to organic solvents to 125 women in a second group. The results were released. There are some statistically

significant differences, but it's also determined that the sample is quite small.

In Alberta, Mr. Speaker, workplace solvents are used everywhere: in your office, in my office. In fact, it's anything from as familiar a product as Wite-Out to formaldehyde used in medical laboratories and cleaning fluids used in dry cleaning operations or manufacturing.

2:30

In 1997, Mr. Speaker, just as the member has asked, Alberta Labour conducted a survey of 15,000 Alberta companies to determine the use and control of various hazardous substances, including organic solvents. Sixty-two percent of the companies reported that solvents were used in the workplace and that worker exposure was controlled through use of proper ventilation, were wearing personal protective equipment and the like. There is legislation in place to protect these workers.

MR. CAO: Thank you. My first supplemental question is also to the same minister. What are the existing laws and regulations protecting pregnant workers and their unborn children from exposure to these organic solvents?

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As was pointed out in some of the detailed questions in Public Accounts this morning, it's important that all workers including pregnant workers, whatever, follow safe work procedures when handling organic solvents and avoid unnecessary exposure. The chemical hazards regulation, which comes under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, is the legislation that sets out the responsibilities of employers for controlling these substances and for providing workers with the information on hazardous materials they will be exposed to in the workplace.

Employers are also expected to have, Mr. Speaker, WHMIS, the workplace hazardous materials information system, in place. I've worked with that personally in my own business, and it does work. It's a national hazardous materials communications program, and worker education is important.

As a matter of fact it's particularly important, Mr. Speaker, so much so that we recognized that as a priority last year when this department granted \$25,000 to the Calgary Catholic Immigrant Aid Society, who then taught this program in over 57 different languages to the immigrant community in Calgary and its environs. As a matter of fact that group is working continually with a company called Cargill in continuing that training.

MR. CAO: My second supplemental is also to the same minister. What is the Department of Labour doing to help ensure that working Albertans, including pregnant workers, are protected from exposure to such organic substances?

MR. SMITH: It's a good and timely question, Mr. Speaker, in light of the continued growth in the economy and the changing industrial structure of this great province. Of course Alberta continues to work with its customers, both employers and employees, to ensure compliance with the chemical hazards regulation. We make preliminary assessments of organic solvent handling in the workplace. We identify other workplace hazards, and if conditions warrant a more detailed assessment, the employer will be asked to undertake air monitoring to evaluate worker exposure. Of course we will take action against companies that do not meet standards. That action can range from stop-work orders until the company institutes proper training and safe work procedures to recommending in fact that charges be laid under the act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A senior Calgary courthouse constable drops his pants at the Department of Justice staff college before two women and then stages a stunt. There's no investigation for over a year. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Why was the incident not dealt with when it occurred?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, candidly, as much as I'd like to talk about this issue, I have to be very careful about what I say. The hon. member is well aware that as was reported this morning, this is a human resource matter currently being dealt with by the Justice department and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. I am aware of the facts surrounding the incident that has been referred to. Unfortunately, I can't and won't talk about anyone's alleged inappropriate behaviour, any evidence, or anything else related to this or any other specific case. What I can tell you is that every case is dealt with in accordance with our zero tolerance policy.

I can say generally, however, Mr. Speaker, that whenever there is a situation involving inappropriate staff behaviour, it is our department officials who investigate that matter. Department officials, as is the case with police officers for example doing an investigation, need to have some substantive evidence in order to pursue that investigation. As also has been indicated by myself publicly before, discipline ranges from reprimand to dismissal, which is the most severe.

The hon. member across the way has been commenting on this particular incident and the department's actions generally for some time. In fact, she went so far as to say in the press the other day that I'd been sitting on my hands, not having done anything on this issue for some time.

What I'd like to point out to all members of the House, Mr. Speaker, is that in early 1997 Alberta Justice conducted induction training, which included a workplace conduct seminar. This was mandatory training for all court and prisoner services officers. In March '97 and again in September '97 we conducted a mandatory refresher course for constables, and this also included a seminar on appropriate workplace conduct. In March of '98 mandatory workshops were held for new recruits on appropriate workplace and sexual conduct. Again in October of '98 mandatory refresher training was provided and also in November '98 Alberta Justice conducted a respectful workplace seminar for all CAPS managers. Also, we're trying to put into place our positive workplace program; we're working with the union in that regard.

To reiterate, Mr. Speaker, our policy is zero tolerance. We take this very seriously. We're working with the union to address it. Unfortunately I can't one hundred percent guarantee the behaviour of employees in this department, nor can anyone, I think, guarantee the behaviour of their employees. All we have to do is constantly point out to them how inappropriate it is for these types of things to happen.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is: how will the minister deal with the managers who swept this incident under the carpet for a year? What kind of leadership are they providing to the rest of the staff?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member knows that I can't get into discussing personnel matters nor what we may or may not do with respect to the managers involved. What I can state is that . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: What's the policy?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, the policy, as I just heard an hon. member ask, is again zero tolerance. We will take a look at how this has been handled, and I'll work with department officials to ensure that the steps that were taken were appropriate.

MS OLSEN: Well, will the minister, then, commit to make it the duty, subject to sanctions of his employees, to report workplace and sexual harassment that they witness? Sanction them if they fail to report the information that they receive.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, I guess, Mr. Speaker, when something like this is reported, it's up to a manager to evaluate whether or not what's been reported is accurate. They need to make that determination on the evidence that is given to them. I certainly wouldn't bring in a policy of automatic sanction which would remove the discretion of any manager to evaluate whether or not the allegations that are being made are substantive or not. What I can point out is that with respect to this particular matter, my understanding is that when the allegations were substantiated, action was taken by management.

The difficulty again, Mr. Speaker, is that we need to give our managers the flexibility in order to make a determination whether or not an issue should be pursued.

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

Property Tax Assessments

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in Calgary the Inner City Coalition held a meeting discussing market value assessment. Aldermen were able to attend, but unfortunately Calgary MLAs were busy in Edmonton in Committee of Supply subcommittees discussing the budget and were unable to attend. I've also been speaking to a number of property owners in Calgary who are concerned about getting information from the city's assessment department regarding how their property assessments are calculated. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Is there anything in the legislation that compels the municipality to give property owners information regarding how their assessment is determined?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, every property owner, every assessed person has the right to full and sufficient information. Under the Municipal Government Act in sections 299 and 300 it's implicit and it's clear that every property owner that wants to find out information relative to the property, how it's assessed, all of the detailed information that is sufficient for them to challenge or question their information as presented by the assessor -- everything must be provided. In fact, that is exactly the word. The assessed person must be provided "sufficient information" to appeal under section 299(1).

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: for the sake of communicating effectively with the city, what type of questions should a taxpayer ask the assessor in order to be assured that his property is being assessed correctly?

2:40

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, most people have a pretty good idea of what their property should relate to in terms of market value. However, if in fact they are not sure, they should call the assessment department and ask how they were assessed, what age the property is in terms of other relative properties that may have been sold

recently in the area, what influence the location of their property had, and any unique features that may be challenged. Clearly realtors can provide that information, but also the assessment department should be able to define reasonable comparatives if they have not done an on-site inspection in assessment of the home.

MR. HLADY: My final supplemental to the same minister. This year we've seen some very significant tax shifts as a result of the introduction of market-value assessment. Can the minister enlighten us as to whether taxpayers can expect these types of shifts to occur in the future?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, clearly the market, the desirability have a great influence, but assessment shifts in the future should be more easily defined and should be more obvious by people within municipalities taking a look at precisely what is happening in the market on their street. In the circumstances in Calgary, the last general assessment was in 1992, and because there has been quite a lag time since that last general assessment, it takes some time for property owners to see the so-called catch-up of their values. Now with market-value assessment annually, with a simple technological change into the computer one should be able to calculate very quickly the overall effect of the assessment changes.

Mr. Speaker, in high-growth communities there will always be these shifts. In many cases annual assessments, however, have been done for years. In Strathcona county with that market-value assessment the assessment shifts have been annualized to the extent that there have been few if any complaints and hardly any challenges at all.

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

Private Vocational Training Programs

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were complaints last week that a job retraining program run by PSDNCIT and accredited by the government was not properly preparing students for the workplace. Promised computers weren't installed for the first three weeks of the course. There was high staff turnover. The school failed to provide proper employment placement assistance, and of the advertised 400 hours of instruction only 280 hours were given. My question is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development: has the government paid PSDNCIT for the delivery of this service?

MR. DUNFORD: I don't know the answer to that question, but we'll find it out and get it to the hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the minister: what kind of monitoring is done of firms who deliver this service to Albertans?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the contracts are awarded, of course, through a bidding process generally. Part of that concern, then, would be an evaluation procedure. The specific evaluation that was done on this contract I'm not aware of at this point. We'll find that out and get it to the hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To this same minister: is there a mechanism to refund students who are caught in contracts with this kind of firm?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, there is, Mr. Speaker. We have a bonding arrangement with any of these private operators. I know it leads to

problems for some of them at times, but we still think it's a fair and reasonable procedure to have in place, and I think the situation that's in front of us today only confirms that we ought to continue to do that.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I notice that six hon. members would like to participate in Recognitions today. We'll begin in 30 seconds.

All right, hon. members. We'll proceed in this order today: first of all, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, the hon. Member for Calgary-West, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Conchita de Pechtel de Avila

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to salute one of my constituents, Conchita de Pechtel de Avila, who started the Spanish dance legacy in Alberta over 40 years ago. She established Spanish dance classes and dance groups that have performed throughout the province, at numerous Canada Day shows with the Edmonton Folk Arts Council, at annual concerts at the Provincial Museum, on several CFRN TV specials, and at the Spokane World's Fair. The Conchita de Pechtel Spanish Dancers also performed at the first-ever Edmonton Heritage Festival in 1976. Of particular note are numerous performances that she and her group did at many hospitals, seniors' homes and lodges in our province. On March 21 at a special Spanish dance spectacular Conchita was recognized as the pioneer of flamenco Spanish dancing in Alberta, and the proceeds were donated in her honour to Our Lady of Guadalupe Hispanic Catholic church, which serves all Spanish speakers in Edmonton.

I was honoured to attend that spectacular event with Hope Ungarian and to present Conchita with a legislative scroll on behalf of our province. Hundreds of dancers and instructors have benefited from Conchita's commitment and dedication including Pedro Guasp, who deserves our thanks for organizing this event. [remarks in Spanish]

Your contribution to Spanish culture in this province is enormous. Many thanks. [as submitted]

Our Voice Magazine

MS BARRETT: In April 1994 Larry Derkach of the Bissell Centre and Martin Garber-Conrad of the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation responded to a need for a street-sold magazine that talked about the issues of poverty in Alberta. Gord Poshwatta was brought on board, and *Our Voice*, the spare change magazine, came to Edmonton. The magazine was a response to the cuts in the social safety net in Alberta. More and more people were living on the streets with fewer options available to help them. *Our Voice* gave them access to information and helped them gain control of their lives.

Our Voice acts as an economic enabler to the citizens who have few employment opportunities available to them. It is an entrepreneurial venture. Buying copies of the magazine and selling them for a negotiable price on the street corners of Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Saskatoon is how vendors make their living and support their families. *Our Voice* tells human stories of real poverty, homelessness, and despair, and looks to find positive solutions.

Tomorrow, April 1, marks the 5th anniversary of *Our Voice* and

also marks the departure of Keith Wiley, editor and designer since its inception. Thank you, Keith, for all of your amazing work, and good luck to Michael Walters, who is guiding *Our Voice* today and into the future.

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

50th Anniversary of Newfoundland in Canada

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and recognize the 50th anniversary of the completion of the Canadian Confederation as we know it at the present time.

When we drink water, we should think of the source; when we eat fruit, we should think of the planter, as an oriental saying goes. On the anniversary of Newfoundland joining the Canadian Confederation, we should glance back at past achievements and experiences. We're thankful to our forefathers and all contributors to our nation-building.

The task of establishing the nation and provinces has been done by our forefathers. However, the more important task of sustaining and developing our nation and provinces to a much higher level is still a great challenge for every one of us, and those important tasks rest squarely on each of us at the present time. There is always stress and strain while making progress. Striking a balance is the proven wisdom. Through the test of time, the challenges of innovative thoughts, our nation and our provinces should continue to be the model for humanitarian endeavours, working in partnership, enriching mutual respect, and living in love and peace.

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

Parkland Continuing Education Council

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to recognize Parkland Continuing Education Council, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. This council serves Spruce Grove, Stony Plain, and Parkland county. Currently on this agency-based council are 18 members, three of whom represent private business, and a recent addition is a volunteer from the Spruce Grove public library.

Parkland Continuing Education Council's vision to March 2000 is: people with a passion for learning. The program priorities are to address the need for technological literacy and improve public Internet access, to work with appropriate agencies to assess need for career counseling in the community, to work with appropriate agencies to identify health and wellness learning needs, to work with appropriate agencies to collaborate on special projects as identified by council members, and my personal favourite, to collaborate with other interested stakeholders on development of a family literacy project.

I am proud of the council's accomplishments over the last 25 years. Our area has been served well.

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

2:50 Scholarship Winners

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very proud of the academic achievements of 140 young adults from my constituency of Calgary-West. One hundred and twenty-nine were recent recipients of Alexander Rutherford scholarships awarded for high school achievement and totaling \$146,700 from the Alberta heritage scholarship fund. Ten postsecondary students received the Louise

McKinney scholarship totaling \$15,000 from the scholarship fund. One postgraduate student received the prestigious Ralph Steinhauer award of distinction with a value of \$15,000.

In reviewing the advanced education record of award winners, I notice that the Alexander Rutherford scholarship recipients had chosen to attend a wide range of high schools in Calgary, 14 to be exact. The high schools, with the number of award students, included Ernest Manning, 36; Western Canada, 28; Central Memorial, 18; Bishop Carroll, 15; St. Mary's community, 15; Calgary Christian, five; Henry Wise Wood, one; Queen Elizabeth, one; William Aberhart, one; Delta West academy, one; Springbank Community, one.

Thank you.

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

Power Engineers

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the outstanding efforts of the power engineers, the men and women who day and night operate power boilers to provide heat and light for the comfort and convenience of Albertans.

Power engineers have operated boilers around the world since the industrial revolution created the stationary engineer. The chief engineer of a power plant used to have the sole discretion in charge of the plant. Plants were regularly shut down for maintenance, and boiler inspectors had the power to shut down companies that refused to do maintenance on their boilers. Power engineers and boiler inspectors enjoy a close working relationship, and the public safety of Albertans is always a prime consideration in their workday.

Thank you.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 71, 72, 89, 90, 119, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 154, 155, and 156.

[Motion carried]

Child Welfare

Q71. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What indicators and statistics are used to determine the percentage of children who stay free from abuse or neglect while in the Ministry of Family and Social Services' care?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Family and Social Services and the government we'd accept the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much.

[Motion carried]

Forever Homes Work Team

Q72. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What are the membership and objectives of the Forever Homes initiative work team?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Family and Social Services and the government we accept the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much.

[Motion carried]

Aboriginal Adoptions

Q89. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What negotiations have taken place on the status of aboriginal adoptions and the reasons for the lack of placements approved by aboriginal bands in the last fiscal year?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We accept the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks to the minister for his co-operativeness.

[Motion carried]

Family and Social Services Staff Achievement Awards

Q90. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What is the breakdown of the approximate \$4 million of achievement awards to departmental staff as outlined in the 1997-98 annual report of the Ministry of Family and Social Services?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We accept the question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to close the debate.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much.

[Motion carried]

Centennial Food Corporation Loan

Q119. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. What is the interest rate on the loan between the government and Centennial Food Corporation for the period March 28, 1991, to February 16, 1999?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I would move that Written Question 119 be amended by striking out "what is" and substituting "what information is publicly available on."

The amended written question will then read as follows:

What information is publicly available on the interest rate on the loan between the government and Centennial Food Corporation for the period March 28, 1991, to February 16, 1999?

In its amended form we would then accept the question.

THE SPEAKER: On the amendment, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: I'm hoping for some clarification. I have no huge background on the particular file between the government and Centennial Food Corporation, but the amendment to provide information that's publicly available -- I don't know what that means. My suspicion is that that may be next to nothing.

You know, the Government House Leader understands that there's a rule of contract talking about terms being certain or ascertainable. I'm not sure how you would ever make the phrase "publicly available" certain or ascertainable. So that's a concern I have, and it seems to me that this may be just another way of the government saying effectively that they're going to provide nothing. By moving the amendment, you achieve that effect without doing it in a straightforward fashion. You do it in a more discreet fashion.

So I do have that concern with respect to the amendment, and short of hearing some more persuasive arguments on the other side, my inclination would be to vote against the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I share the concern of my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo. In fact, I believe the amendment is a little disingenuous. In correspondence dated November 17, 1998, from the Provincial Treasurer to myself he indicates that the terms of the loan will not be released because of commercial confidentiality concerns. In other words, the Treasurer has already stated that there is nothing that is publicly available. So to amend the motion to insert those words to suggest that the government would be forthcoming with information really doesn't tell the story in an accurate or correct form.

So I would not accept the amendment, Mr. Speaker, and furthermore would suggest that it is an amendment of questionable validity in that it alters in a very fundamental way the intent of the original motion. I know that it has been approved by Parliamentary Counsel, but as we've had discussions on before in the House, that's not the ultimate test of whether the motion is in its appropriate form.

This amendment, as I say, substantially alters the intent of the original motion, so not only am I opposed to it, but I do believe it may not even be an appropriate amendment to put forward.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MR. SAPERS: Well, it wouldn't actually be to close the debate

because now it's been amended by the government; hasn't it? So this is not my motion. This is their motion.

THE SPEAKER: It's your motion as amended. Close the debate.

MR. SAPERS: Okay. I just wanted that piece of clarity.

MR. DICKSON: I'd like an opportunity to make a couple of comments with respect to the amended motion before we vote on it. My concern is this. I have to ask myself why Albertans, who are the ones who stand to be prejudiced, should not be entitled to know the interest rate on a loan. I could understand if we were asking for the loan application. I could understand if we were asking for the trade secrets, the confidential internal memoranda of Centennial Food Corporation. The government and Provincial Treasurer would be probably negligent if they weren't on their feet objecting to that. But what we're talking about is what an interest rate is.

3:00

You know, if somebody wants to find out what the interest rate is on the mortgage on my home, they can do a title search. We know what all kinds of interest rates are for commercially available loans. Here, where we're talking about Alberta taxpayers being on the hook, to simply ask what the interest rate is seems to me so fundamental that I can hardly conceive of a reason why that information would not be shared. How else can Albertans and how else can legislators test whether it's a commercially fair interest rate? How can we be sure that government is properly representing the interests of taxpayers if we don't know what kind of interest rates are available?

I would think that the government would be so fast to adopt this for fear that there would be all kinds of more detailed questions about other elements of the loan. Nobody's asking for that. Nobody's asking what the security instruments are. Nobody's asking what the value is of the security items. Maybe that information should be publicly available too.

Let's consider the proposition that the government's putting forward. It's simply this: the government refuses to disclose the interest rate on a loan between the government and Centennial Food Corporation. I can't think of any reason why that interest rate should be a secret that Albertans wouldn't be privy to. Then of course it wouldn't be a secret anymore, but it's information that ought to be publicly available.

The Provincial Treasurer has traveled from one end of this country to the other talking about the new way we budget in Alberta. [interjection] Well, the united alternative too.

I've heard him on the radio, and I've seen him on cooking programs. There has been no venue that the hon. Provincial Treasurer has passed up in an effort to talk about his latest project. One would have thought that somewhere in between the cooking programs and the phone-in programs and traveling to Toronto and so on, he might have been able to share with people that in this province all that information isn't available. People in Edson want to know what the interest rate is in this deal between their government and Centennial Food Corporation. I know there are people in Edson who would be interested in knowing this information. Why can't we have it? There's been no cogent explanation in terms of why that information wouldn't be shared.

It is a difficult tattoo to shadowbox. It's difficult to try and refute an argument when there's no argument being put in front of us. I can only hope that the Provincial Treasurer reconsiders what's at risk here as he considers his political options and future options. If in fact the Provincial Treasurer wants to be presented as the man

with the fresh approach to fiscal management, if he wants to be presented as the great white hope for the far right in this country -- many of those people are very concerned about a greater level of disclosure -- he's going to have to make his presentation in this Chamber.

I'm looking forward to the debate that's going to ensue, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, as we have said a number of times -- and a few of those times the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* has been here to listen to it. Most of the time he's out expending a travel budget far beyond what I spend, and he's doing that as an MLA, a huge amount of travel expense, so he should know what Albertans are saying. Again, a poll showing today 86 percent of Albertans saying that they like this budget and they like the way we account for things. I can tell you that we continue to get accolades from across this country about openness and transparency in accounting and in reporting. Now, he can do all he wants to try and smear what is a very good image. I'm not talking about me here; I'm talking about government. He can do all he wants, for the most questionable of political purposes, to try and cast aspersions on that when there are none to be cast.

Now, this particular agreement between the government and Centennial Food is not an agreement into which we would enter today. As a matter of fact, we have a business limitation act which prevents us from doing that. But as the agreement was constituted when it was written -- and I wish he'd pay attention for a minute. He loves to stand up and spew the most ridiculous inanities, yet when it's coming back at him, in fact he doesn't even like to listen. But I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when this deal was signed -- and I don't know how many times I have to explain this to them -- there were certain agreements signed. One of those was release of information.

Now, I'm going to say this slowly. Try and get it straight. Release of information and confidentiality agreements were signed. Would they be signed today? No. Do I particularly love the agreement that was signed? No. Was it an agreement drafted by lawyers that we were told we had to stick with or else face legal action? Yes. Lawyers drafted it. Lawyers told us: you cannot breach the confidentiality of this deal. I would love to tell Albertans . . . [interjection] Now he's squealing, as I knew he would. I listened carefully to him. Now he's squealing.

Mr. Speaker, the day may come when this particular deal is complete and we can release all details of it. I look forward to that. I would love to let Albertans know about this particular deal, but an agreement was signed in law. And if anybody preaches with evangelical fervour about contract law, it's the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*. He tries to buffalo us all the time on that issue. Now what he's suggesting -- let's get this straight -- is that I or a member of this government break the law, that we come out and say: "We don't care what was signed. We don't care about past agreements. We don't care about legal counsel on both sides telling us that we're not allowed to do this." He's saying: break the law, Mr. Minister. He's saying: break the law, Provincial Treasurer. Is it so that he'll get some more business? I don't know, but he's telling us, he's begging us to break the law. We should understand that today.

In terms of client confidentiality, if anybody would squeal to high heaven on the point of confidentiality with clients, it would be the buffalo from Calgary-*Buffalo* -- sorry; the Member for Calgary-*Buffalo*. He would squeal and shriek about anybody saying that a previous contract should be breached and broken. I also invite him to please phone Centennial Food. They are his constituents; they live in Calgary. About 400 employees work in that operation, 400 Calgaryans. Go onto the plant floor and demand that this information

be released, and if they agree to it, I will wholeheartedly sign and release it. But stop telling us to break the law, stop telling us to breach client confidentiality, and stop telling us to do things that are illegal. It's reprehensible, and you should quit.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Well, this has been a very interesting exchange. While I do not claim to have a law degree or share the experience of the member opposite and I'm more recently into this Legislative Assembly, I have to say that for the person on the street . . .

MS OLSEN: You do have a degree.

MS BLAKEMAN: Indeed I have more than one.

I find it very interesting that this is the government, this same government, including many of these same members we see on the front bench here, that signed this agreement. Now they say that they don't like it. Now they say that they're unhappy with it and that, gosh, their hands are tied; they can't release this information.

Speaking specifically to the amendment, it troubles me that such an amendment would be put forward. If it's well known that indeed there was a nondisclosure agreement that this government -- no other government but this one -- deliberately signed with a group that would not allow any information to be disclosed, then how can this be the same government that claims to be open and accountable? As a person on the street I would have to say: well, why? What's the problem? What's behind this? And now I hear that you can't disclose anything because the government signed an agreement not to disclose anything with this group. Boy, this sure makes people on the street suspicious of what's in this agreement. It sure encourages people to dig a little deeper about what was going on here.

3:10

This to me looked like a fairly straightforward question when we started into it, but having had this amendment brought forward, well, it certainly piqued my interest. I will be looking forward with great anticipation to what other questions are necessary to be raised about the agreement that this government made with Centennial Food. If it's that difficult to find out an interest rate, goodness gracious, what else will be even more interesting to find out about this? I encourage my colleagues to pursue this with all due fervour. If a simple interest rate isn't possible to be disclosed, what else is not possible to be disclosed? I have to say that I'm very disappointed in the government for this.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion.

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

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very surprised by what the simple request unleashed in the Provincial Treasurer. The deal must be one that is stunningly poor for the taxpayers of Alberta. I would say, for the sake of the record, that the loan agreement of March 28, 1991, between Centennial Food and the government of Alberta provided for a term credit facility in a principal amount of \$15 million, together with interest and participation payments. The interest payments were to be based on cash flow. The loan is due and fully payable by the year 2003. This loan was secured by security interest on real property: plant and equipment assets of Centennial Food located in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. The debenture held by the province ranked

behind the security held by the principal lender to Centennial Food, that being the Royal Bank. Security held by the Royal Bank was not to exceed the principal indebtedness in excess of \$12.64 million.

On October 29, 1996, the Deputy Provincial Treasurer consented to an amendment to the debenture agreement between the province and the company, under which the corporation paid out the Royal Bank and established new credit facilities with the Bank of Montreal. It's unclear as to the amount owing to the Royal Bank as of August of '96 and the circumstances which led to the Royal Bank's exit.

As of March 31, 1998, the amount outstanding on the loan was \$14.25 million. Now, the government of Alberta has received \$135,000 in interest payments as of July 31, 1997, and \$450,000 in principal payments. A \$350,000 payment on the principal was made in fiscal year '96-97, and another \$300,000 payment on principal was made in fiscal year '97-98. Budget '99 indicates there is still \$14 million owing on the loan.

Mr. Speaker, this is not an insubstantial amount of money, and there was nothing ridiculous or silly or particularly provocative about what my colleague from Calgary-*Buffalo* was saying to the Treasurer. I guess I'll put it this way: I'm detecting a pattern. Whenever the Treasurer is feeling particular heat on an issue, instead of dealing with the question and the substance of it, he gets very personal. That's too bad, because the Treasurer makes a valid point when he talks about the confidentiality agreement that was signed.

I would say this to the Provincial Treasurer. There were confidentiality agreements in place around West Edmonton Mall refinancing as well. There were caveats in place and side deals in place and paperwork that said: make sure we don't reveal this until the next provincial election. The Treasurer didn't have any problem, when it was politically expedient, having that reviewed perhaps by the Auditor General or holding press conferences and talking about that. He didn't discourage the Alberta Treasury Branches from including certain statements about that particular file in its annual business report. So the Provincial Treasurer doesn't seem to be very consistent on when confidentiality must be protected and when it can be breached. In fact, he seems to be relatively political about that.

I will also say that I was surprised that the Provincial Treasurer would blame a bad deal -- what we can only assume is a bad deal -- on lawyers, lawyers who are no doubt acting on the instructions of their client, in this case being the province of Alberta. As some of the Treasurer's colleagues on the front bench might be able to advise him, lawyers simply do what they're paid to do: provide advice and act on instructions. It's not very becoming of the Treasurer to condemn an entire profession of men and women because a client, in this case the Treasurer's own government, gave some apparently inappropriate advice to the lawyers it had retained to do legal work.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure it will fall on deaf ears, but I'll ask anyway. I'll ask for the Treasurer to rethink his position, to be forthcoming on this point, to tell the people of Alberta what kind of deal they're into and to do so quickly. This is not just the government; it's not their money. It's the taxpayers' money. If there's any remedial action that we should take, perhaps we should take it.

I mean, it was this Treasurer who decided he was going to fly down to Seattle and confront Bill Gates about year 2000 issues. I'm sure there were all kinds of confidentiality and utilization agreements in place when we signed software agreements, when the government departments and agencies decided to purchase software and some of it no doubt produced by Microsoft. That hasn't seemed to stop the Provincial Treasurer from engaging in a legal challenge. So if he's willing to take on Bill Gates and Microsoft, I'm wondering why he would be so afraid to perhaps have to take on Centennial Food. I'm not even sure that he'd have to, because I'm not sure that Centennial Food is afraid of this information becoming public, at least not anywhere near as concerned as the Provincial Treasurer

himself is.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that this motion be accepted in its original form. Obviously we're dealing with the amended motion, which, as I pointed out before, is relatively meaningless.

[Motion as amended carried]

Rates of Return for Trust Funds

Q122. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. What was the average rate of return on trust funds administered by the Department of Justice and Attorney General for the Public Trustee trusts, the various courts and sheriffs' offices trusts, maintenance enforcement trusts, solicitors' trusts, institutional trusts, and impaired driving initiative trusts for each of the 10 fiscal years ending March 31, 1998?

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with regret that I reject this written question. The average rate of return is not calculated on a fiscal year basis. As well, the majority of Crown investments are in the form of 30-day term deposits. When a term deposit matures, the total amount is reinvested for a further term at the current interest rate. These term deposit rollovers can occur for a number of years, until there is an order for the disposition of the moneys. In view of this practice the rate of return is not calculable by fiscal year nor relevant, as the total proceeds on disposition are paid out to the entitled party or parties. The prevailing rates of the financial institutions are applied to disposition of the funds. Consequently, the rate of return on any bank account or investment with a financial institution has followed the economic trends of the past 10 years.

Just for information, Madam Speaker, commencing in 1997-98 trust funds under administration by the Ministry of Justice are reported as a note to the financial statements contained in the ministry's annual report.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm disappointed that we can't get the information. I also make an apology to the hon. member. There is no impaired driving initiative trust any longer.

However, I think that the Public Trustee trusts' average rate of return should be available as a performance measure, so I'm just wondering why this isn't done. However, I guess we're not going to get into any arm-twisting here over this.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

3:20 Nomura Asset Capital Corporation

Q123. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. When did the agenda and priorities committee, the Treasury Board, and/or members of the Executive Council first consider the July 13, 1994, and September 26, 1994, refinancing proposals between the Alberta Treasury Branches, Nomura Asset Capital Corporation, and Nomura Securities International?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer and the government I would reject that question. The involvement of the Treasury Branches with the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall was reviewed by the Auditor General's report, which was released publicly last month. The matter is the subject of legal action. We've debated this so many times in written questions that I don't think I'll even continue.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. We have debated this a number of times, and every time it's in the context of the government refusing to disclose information. Every time we debate this, it's in response to the government's unwillingness or their denial to tell the taxpayers of Alberta how come they got into this mess. So I guess we'll be debating this many, many more times until the government is forthcoming, until the government lives up to its words of being open and accountable.

In fact this matter, the Nomura refinancing agreement, is not before the courts, so even the suggestion of sub judice is irrelevant. The Auditor General's report was released, but the Auditor General's report is (a) incomplete and (b) makes specific reference to the Nomura deal. For the benefit of those members who haven't read the Auditor General's report, let me refer to it for just a moment. At page 21 of the Auditor General's report the Auditor General talks about the second stage of the Nomura proposal involving "the transfer of the Mall to another company by means of a judicial sale," Madam Speaker, of all things.

ATB was required to provide a loan of \$10 million secured by a second mortgage. Nomura planned to securitize and market its \$350 million loan, which required [in order to do so] favorable ratings from a rating agency.

It was unable to get this favourable bond rating. Now, "this Nomura proposal would have limited ATB's additional exposure to \$85 million." That is just a shadow of the over \$400 million exposure that the ATB ultimately ended up with.

We know as well from the Auditor General that it was the government, in its agenda and priorities committee discussions, that rejected the private-sector financing. It wasn't the ATB; it was the government that rejected the financing. Because of that rejection Alberta taxpayers were exposed to much higher risk. The Auditor General goes on to say on page 22 of his report that the agreement would have given ATB a much better security position, yet we find that the agreement was never operationalized. In fact, Nomura received a breakup fee of some substantial dollars.

Now, it is very, very clear, if you read the Auditor General's report, that there are several questions about the government's motivations. One thing that the Auditor General was not able to determine is why a loan that had no commercial value whatsoever, a loan that the ATB and the government are now all saying was not based on current business practices, why such a loan was entered into. One piece of the puzzle that will help Albertans understand the behaviour and the actions and the decisions of their government would be to know when the government's most powerful internal committee, the agenda and priorities committee, or the Treasury Board reviewed those financing proposals between Alberta Treasury Branches and Nomura. Without that information we're only left to speculate, and perhaps the worst conclusions will be drawn, perhaps conclusions that are far more sinister than are really the case. But you certainly couldn't fault anybody for coming to the conclusion

that the government has something to hide because they're simply not answering the questions.

So I would once again urge acceptance of Written Question 123.

[Motion lost]

Public Trustee Agreements

Q124. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. How many agreements has the Public Trustee entered into during the period January 1, 1990, to February 16, 1999, which specify that the Public Trustee will always act as the trustee of an individual notwithstanding that another person has been or may be appointed trustee of the individual pursuant to the Dependent Adults Act?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm prepared to accept that written question.

MS OLSEN: I really do appreciate working with the minister when he's that co-operative. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Dependent Adults Act Trustee Applications

Q125. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. How many applications has the Public Trustee made pursuant to the Dependent Adults Act in the period January 1, 1990, to February 16, 1999, to act as trustee for the estate of individuals who at the time of the Public Trustee's application had brought legal action against the government or its agencies in respect of forced sterilization or other personal injury actions?

MS OLSEN: I'm hoping I'm not pushing my luck here.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, we're on a roll. I'll accept that one too, Madam Speaker.

MS OLSEN: I'm going to have a happy Easter, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move Written Question 126 standing on the Order Paper in my name . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No, no.

MS OLSEN: Oh, I got carried away. Sorry.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Norwood, you're closing debate on 125.

MS OLSEN: Thank you for accepting that, Mr. Minister.

[Motion carried]

Missing Public Trustee Clients

Q126. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. What efforts does the Public Trustee make to locate missing persons whose estates it administers, and what percentage of missing persons were located in each of the past six fiscal years?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I'd like to move an amendment to the question, Madam Speaker. I'd like to strike out "and what percentage of missing persons were located in each of the past six fiscal years." That will leave the question as amended to read as follows:

What efforts does the Public Trustee make to locate missing persons whose estates it administers?

With respect to the rationale for the amendment, Madam Speaker, the office of the Public Trustee maintains missing persons' identification on a current status basis only. To identify this information for each of the previous six fiscal years would involve a manual review of each and every file opened or closed during the six-year period in question, and I don't think that's an efficient use of the department's resources at this time.

MS OLSEN: On the amendment. Well, I guess I am disappointed. I would like the percentage. I understand the work that would have to be conducted in the minister's office in order to bring this forward, but I just might mention that this to me would seem to be a good performance measure. I'm just wondering how, then, the minister would evaluate different strategies to find these people if you don't keep statistics on them. I, you know, am not in a position to be wanting to accept the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you. The comments I made I think are relevant to this particular question. I think that maybe the minister should give some consideration to tracking percentages if you want to monitor the success rates of various methods. I think this should be given some consideration anyway.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish we could have this accepted; however, we won't.

[Motion as amended carried]

3:30 Missing Public Trustee Clients

Q127. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. How many estates of missing persons does the Public Trustee administer, and what is the aggregate dollar value of the assets of these estates?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you. I'd like to move an amendment to this particular written question, Madam Speaker. I'd like to add "where the assets of a missing person have been brought to the Public Trustee for administration" after "administer." I'd like to strike out "aggregate dollar" and substitute "net book." I'd like to strike out "assets of these estates" and substitute "trust accounts held for such missing persons."

So the question as amended will now read as follows:

How many estates of missing persons does the Public Trustee administer where the assets of a missing person have been brought to the Public Trustee for administration, and what is the net book

value of the trust accounts held for such missing persons?

The rationale. Madam Speaker, the way the question was originally structured was unclear and would include all individuals for whom we currently did not know the whereabouts. The rephrased question clearly identifies a specific estate type. The term "net book value" is substituted for "aggregate dollar value" because the value of some types of assets are not known until disposed of and therefore are given an accounting value of \$1 only.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the amendment, hon. member.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I will accept this amendment. Thank you.

MR. HAVELOCK: My pleasure.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. member to close debate.

MS OLSEN: Thank you. We accept the amendment and appreciate the co-operation. Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

Trust Fund Amounts

Q128. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. What were the minimum and maximum amounts held in the trust funds being administered by the Department of Justice and Attorney General under the Public Trustee trusts, the various courts and sheriffs' offices trusts, maintenance enforcement trusts, solicitors' trusts, institutional trusts, and impaired driving initiatives trusts in each calendar month during the five-year period ending December 31, 1998?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to put forward a few amendments. I'd like to strike out "minimum and maximum." I'd like to strike out "institutional trust, and impaired driving initiatives trust" and substitute "and institutional trust." I'd like to strike out "calendar month" and substitute "fiscal year." I'd like to strike out "December 31, 1998" and substitute "March 31, 1998." So the question as amended will read as follows:

What were the amounts held in the trust funds being administered by the Department of Justice and Attorney General under the Public Trustee trusts, the various courts and sheriffs' offices trusts, maintenance enforcement trusts, solicitors' trusts, and institutional trusts in each fiscal year during the five-year period ended March 31, 1998?

The reasoning behind the amendments, Madam Speaker. The minimum and maximum amounts are not relevant as the ministry has an obligation to administer the trust funds regardless of the amount. Also, the amounts are assembled and reported on a fiscal year basis and not by calendar year.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. member on the amendment.

MS OLSEN: Yes. You know, I'm prepared to accept the amendment, but I just want to point out to the minister that I'm concerned about the fact that they cannot give minimum and maximum amounts, which indicates that in fact the monitoring of the fund for

the purpose of investment may not be appropriately done. However, we'll accept the amendment as it sits.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We again appreciate the co-operation in answering this question.

[Motion as amended carried]

Trust Fund Investments

Q129. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. What investment firms, banks, trust companies, or other advisors were retained by the Department of Justice and Attorney General to administer and invest trust funds, namely the Public Trustee trusts, the various courts and sheriffs' offices trusts, maintenance enforcement trusts, solicitors' trusts, institutional trusts, and impaired driving initiatives trusts, in each of the 10 fiscal years ended March 31, 1998?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Madam Speaker, in the true spirit of not sitting on my hands, I'll accept this question.

MS OLSEN: Well, I think the minister does need positive reinforcement. I appreciate the fact that he will accept this question. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Centennial Food Corporation Loan

Q130. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. What is the amount of interest that has accrued on the government's loan to Centennial Food Corporation between March 28, 1991, and February 16, 1999?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I would move that Written Question 130 be amended by striking out "what is" and substituting "what information is publicly available on". The amended question would then read:

What information is publicly available on the amount of interest that has accrued on the government's loan to Centennial Food Corporation between March 28, 1991, and February 16, 1999?

The rationale for the amendment is that the question as previously posed, without the amendment, would release confidential financial information about Centennial, which the province is not authorized to release. The information has been requested previously, and the company has refused consent to release the information. It has also been the subject of a freedom of information request, and the company objected to the release of the information. A decision was taken by Treasury not to release the information, and the decision was upheld by the Privacy Commissioner.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the amendments, Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. We're sort of back to the question we were wrestling with a little bit before. There's something that wasn't on the table when we dealt with the earlier Centennial Food Corporation loan, and that's an interesting piece of correspondence I happen to have in my hand. The Provincial Treasurer, as I understood it, took the position a bit ago that there were confidentiality provisions in the loan agreement between the government of the province of Alberta and Centennial Food Corporation that would tie the Provincial Treasurer's hands. He wouldn't be able to share the information to respond to the written question.

What I'm addressing here, of course, is the amendment, "what information is publicly available on," why that's not good enough.

3:40

MR. SAPERS: He in fact accused you of counseling him to break the law.

MR. DICKSON: Indeed. I'm reminded that the Provincial Treasurer suggested that I was attempting to counsel him to breach the law.

What is curious is that the very same Provincial Treasurer on August 8, 1997, wrote the Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek, who was then the Treasury critic for the Official Opposition. I'll just quote the one key paragraph:

To July 31, 1997, the government has received \$135,000 in interest payments and \$450,000 in loan principal repayments. Interest accrues and is payable based on cash flow thresholds. Scheduled principal payments are payable regardless of cash flow.

This is an excerpt only. The letter is four pages long, and I'm happy to share it with anybody who wants to read it.

Here's the interesting thing: the Provincial Treasurer a moment ago . . .

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

Point of Order Citing Documents

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Madam Speaker, if he's reading from the letter, surely he should at least have all four pages with him and have it indicate that it's signed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It is customary in the Assembly, hon. member, to table this type of correspondence.

MR. DICKSON: I've got the requisite number of copies, and I'm happy to table them. I want to make it clear in terms of the letter that it's not four pages; it's four paragraphs.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: The point I was making, Madam Speaker, is this. How is it that the Provincial Treasurer can be so outraged and so indignant about a suggestion he should disclose some information about the interest rate when in fact on August 8, 1997, he was prepared to share with the then Liberal Treasury critic all kinds of information with respect to interest payments? Now what we have is an interesting provision where the hon. Provincial Treasurer believes in selective enforcement. Some confidentiality agreements he will respect and protect and enforce, and others he'll ignore and he'll share the information anyway.

It seems to me, Madam Speaker, that the issue in terms of disclosure of information is one the public has a right to know. The amendment to refer to "what information is publicly available" is

simply not adequate and doesn't address the important concern.

As my colleague from Edmonton-Glenora had mentioned before, we're talking about a \$15 million loan that was approved through order in council on February 28, 1991, to Centennial Food Corporation. It's fine for the Provincial Treasurer to come and shrug his shoulders and say: gee, this was an agreement made some time back. What we find is that when it suits the purposes of the current government, they're prepared to share information, and when they want to avoid political embarrassment, then they close down, pull down the shutters, and start invoking different kinds of secrecy rationalizations.

I would encourage the government to reconsider their position on this one, particularly in light of the selective approach that the Provincial Treasurer has taken to the issue of disclosure of elements of the loan agreement.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate on the amendment.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I will be voting loudly against the motion as amended and the amendment that's before us. I will be doing so because I will not knowingly participate in deceit. I believe that the government is trying to pull the wool over the taxpayers' eyes by suggesting with this amendment that by including "publicly available," they are somehow being forthcoming. Of course they won't be.

I previously referred to the correspondence of the Provincial Treasurer dated November 17, 1998. It's clear that the government does not intend to be open and transparent and accountable to the people of Alberta in regard to this loan matter. I would have thought that it would have been much more honest of government to simply reject the written question rather than pretend that it was going to give information by proposing what is really an inappropriate amendment that substantially changes the nature of the original motion. If this amendment passes, the motion as amended will be rendered useless as far as the people of Alberta are concerned.

So I will be opposed to this amendment, and I will be then opposed to the amended motion, should the unthinkable happen and this amendment pass.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MR. SAPERS: Well, the unthinkable just happened. Every day in Alberta we reach a new low when it comes to the government not providing information to the people of the province. That benchmark is being set just about every day when we deal with these written questions.

I am very, very disheartened and disappointed by this rejection on the part of the government to be forthcoming. [interjection] Except for the ones that have been accepted.

In any case, Madam Speaker, the amended motion doesn't address the information need whatsoever.

[Motion as amended carried]

Centennial Food Corporation Loan

Q131. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. What is the amount of participation payments received by

the government between March 28, 1991, and February 16, 1999, under its loan agreement with Centennial Food Corporation?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer, I'd move that Written Question 131 be amended by striking out "what is" and substituting "what information is publicly available on." The amended Written Question 131 will read as follows:

What information is publicly available on the amount of participation payments received by the government between March 28, 1991, and February 16, 1999, under its loan agreement with Centennial Food Corporation?

The argument is the same as the last one.

MR. SAPERS: I am speaking against the amendment. It is a shameless continuation of the deceit that's being perpetuated upon the taxpayers of Alberta.

[Motion on amendment carried]

AN HON. MEMBER: I thought we lost that one.

MR. SAPERS: I thought you lost that one too, hon. member.

I can cut to the chase on this, Madam Speaker. The amended motion does neither us nor the taxpayers of the province any good.

[Motion as amended carried]

Public Trustee Administration Fees

Q132. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted.
What administration fees does the Public Trustee charge, and how are these fees administered by type of trust?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, thank you so much. To get things back on track, I'll accept that question.

MS OLSEN: I would appreciate that. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

3:50 West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

Q133. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted.
On what basis and on whose advice did the February 14, 1994, agenda and priorities committee meeting agree that no agreement between Alberta Treasury Branches and Gentra Canada Investments Inc. be finalized?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the government I would reject that question.

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

MR. SAPERS: Well, this continues the denial of the government, the pattern where they will not provide information on a half billion dollar boondoggle that's on the minds of Albertans throughout the province. The agenda and priorities committee's decision on

February 14, 1994, to scuttle the Gentra deal is one of the key pieces in the whole West Edmonton Mall saga, and in fact it led the Auditor General to conclude that the government had made a decision to get itself involved with the West Edmonton Mall refinancing.

It seems, Madam Speaker, that the government may be refusing to answer questions in this regard because they received no external advice or had no valuation or had no cost-benefit analysis and were simply making a political decision. If that's the case, then somebody in the government ought to stand up and say so, so the people of Alberta can decide whether it was a good or a bad political decision. I can't for the life of me understand why the government would continue, with all that's been said and done regarding the Alberta Treasury Branch/government involvement in West Edmonton Mall, to deny the importance of this piece of information and not be forthcoming with the taxpayers of this province.

We're told in the Auditor General's report that "the decision was based on the Committee's belief that the economy of the Province would suffer as a result of a [West Edmonton Mall] bankruptcy." The committee's decision was subsequently recorded in a memorandum that was sent from the Premier to the then Provincial Treasurer and the then Deputy Premier and minister of economic development and tourism saying: don't finalize the Gentra deal. That memo then found its way to the superintendent of the Treasury Branch.

It's very clear that there was very little to back that up. In fact, the Auditor General says on page 11 of his report on the 1994 refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, in the middle of the page:

Also, it did not have an analysis of the potential risks and costs to ATB and the government of delaying the implementation of the Gentra/ATB agreement. Had these two analyses been compared, there would have been a supportable basis for the Committee to make a decision.

So for the government to say that all the information has been provided to the Auditor General and therefore they don't need to answer this question because it's been answered is just misleading. In fact, the Auditor General does not have a valuation or analysis that this decision was based on. Whether that analysis exists or not is an open question. If the government has it, why they don't want to release it is an open question. If the government doesn't have it, then the real question is: how could they come to the conclusion they reached on February 14, 1994?

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

Q154. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that the following question be accepted.

When did Treasury [Branch] and/or members of the Executive Council become aware of the decision to replace Nomura Asset Capital Corporation and Nomura Securities International with the Toronto Dominion Bank or its subsidiaries as the lead lender for the refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm sure the hon. member meant Treasury "Board," but in any event, on behalf of the government I would reject the question.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to close debate.

MR. DICKSON: I did indeed mean Treasury Board, and I appreciate the correction if not the position.

Madam Speaker, the concern for this kind of information will continue insofar as the Premier of the province has refused to share with Albertans, to share with the members of this Assembly the sworn statutory declaration that was submitted to the Auditor General. We will continue to ask questions because the information that's necessary for legislators and Albertans to be able to evaluate what happened and why -- we can't test the veracity of sworn statements.

It also brings up the other really frustrating concern. A statutory declaration, Madam Speaker, typically reflects more the drafting skill and the competence of the lawyer that prepared it than anything else. The most useful tool for ferreting out the truth is cross-examination. It's not good enough for someone to say, "I swore a statutory declaration, but you can't see it," when there's been no testing of the averments in the statutory declaration. So that's why it becomes so important for the kind of information that's set out in Written Question 154 to be produced.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Medical Examiner Toxicology Tests

Q155. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. How many toxicology tests did the medical examiner's offices undertake in the period April 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999, where the results were not received for more than seven days, what were the names of these tests, and what was the minimum, maximum, and average turnaround time for results for these tests received by February 16, 1999?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is with regret that I have to reject this written question, although we do have some good reasons why, and hopefully the hon. member will agree.

The medical examiner's office conducts a variable number of tests on nearly 2,000 cases per year. The extent and complexity of this testing varies considerably from case to case depending on the type of death and the exact circumstances under which the death occurred. Toxicology testing is therefore case focused and not test focused. A single case may have from one to as many as 20 different tests performed. Most cases typically have 10 or more. Some tests are relatively simple and routine; others are very complex and not routinely performed, unlike the routine tests performed in hospital laboratories. Occasionally a new test must be developed and validated for a specific case, a potentially difficult and time-consuming process.

Statistics on the number or frequency of individual tests are not tracked manually. The computer system used by the medical examiner's office does not have the capability of tracking individual tests. Development and introduction of such a tracking system would not be cost-effective. Therefore, due to the excessive amount of effort and cost entailed, I am rejecting the question.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason I put forward this question is that in the past year or so there's been quite a length of time for some of the forensic tests to be done in relation to some homicide cases. In one specific case that I can think of right now,

it took three months for the toxicology tests to come back before the family knew the cause of death and that in fact the death was a homicide as opposed to some other type of death. To the minister: I'm a little concerned that these tests are coming back in that length of time. I'm not sure if there are specific cases like that that he might want to see monitored and ensure that the turnaround time, especially for the family's sake and for the police investigation, is expedited as fast as it can be.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

4:00 Justice of the Peace Office Renovations

Q156. Ms Olsen moved that the following question be accepted. What was the cost of renovating the justice of the peace offices in Edmonton and Calgary in the period January 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Madam Speaker, this is an incredibly technical, sensitive, and confidential matter, and I will be accepting the question.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you. I appreciate the energy and the length of time it took to get the answers for that. I appreciate that.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of the motions for returns noted in my notice of motion yesterday, and I'll save the House some time by not reading off the entire list. They can be found on page 799 of *Hansard* or on page 47 of today's Order Paper.

[Motion 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.

[Adjourned debate March 24: Ms Olsen]

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

MS OLSEN: I have concluded my comments, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It actually was the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford who moved it previously on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. Because this was a motion for a return from last week, maybe it would be advisable if the government would maybe for the record indicate what they plan to do with this motion.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, I think it's a matter of record that we rejected the motion. There was some debate on it. I'm happy to reaffirm that.

[Motion lost]

Transition Fund

M35. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all proposals submitted to the Department of Health for funding under the federal government's health transition fund from January 1, 1998, to February 17, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and the government I would reject the question, unfortunately. Apparently this is a federal government initiative managed by Alberta Health. The proposals require a line-by-line review to determine if there are mandatory exclusions, including business interests and disclosures harmful to personal privacy. The projects are funded under a contribution agreement between the federal health transition fund and Alberta Health. The health transition fund's mandate is to share all learning and evidence within Alberta and across Canada, so accessing information about approved proposals is very open. The approved proposals are listed on Alberta Health's web site and include the purpose of each project, description, and outcomes.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to conclude debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I'm disappointed that we're not able to receive the information. The member is correct in saying that it is a federal government initiative that established this health transition fund to provide money to projects that are looking at new ways of delivering primary care services. However, the government of Alberta did select the successful projects. I believe 10 were from Calgary, four from Edmonton, and others from throughout the province. The member was most interested in what the proposals entailed and what the other proposals were that were put forward which did not receive the funding, as a way of being able to analyze the success and how wide reaching this program was. I'm disappointed that there will not be information forthcoming.

[Motion lost]

Hill and Knowlton Health Services

M36. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all agreements with Hill and Knowlton for services provided to the Department of Health from January 1, 1998, to February 17, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and the government I would reject the question. The total price of contracts apparently is generally public information, but the unit price is not released as it could be harmful to the business interests of the contractor and it could be harmful to the economic interests of the government.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This motion for a return was really looking for the agreements. I see there's been an assumption made that the inquiry was being made for the amount of the fees, and that's not in fact what the motion for a return is asking for. It asks for the agreements.

I note that Hill and Knowlton are a public relations firm. They are worldwide, and I believe that in some of their literature, particularly on the World Wide Web, they're making quite an issue of how they are advising private health care providers and lobbying for them to governments and acting as an advocate. We would have been most interested to learn what the agreement was and what the issues were that the government or the Minister of Health was most concerned about having this public relations firm of Hill and Knowlton cover.

I think this is of great interest to people in the public. I mean, the government has an entire department called the Public Affairs Bureau to be able to handle any public relations needs between the government and the public. Therefore, why do we have another firm, a very large firm and very well known, particularly for advocacy of private sources with the government? Why do we have them now hired to work for the Ministry of Health? It's raising questions in people's minds and certainly in my mind. I'm sure the record of *Hansard* will show and is publicly available, of course, for other people to read the rejection of this request for information and to make up their own minds what that is likely to be indicating.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion lost]

4:10 Nonhospital Surgical Services

M37. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all agreements approved by the Minister of Health for the provision of insured services in nonhospital surgical facilities from April 1, 1998, to February 17, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is one of those questions where you don't know whether to accept or reject, but on behalf of the government I'll reject this question. I'd reject this question with the advice that there are no records of agreements "approved by the Minister of Health for the provision of insured services in [nonmedical] surgical facilities from April 1, 1998, to February 17, 1999." So in rejecting the question, I'm providing I think the information required by the question without the need of going through a motion for a return.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: I appreciate the hon. House leader's attempt to clarify that. Every little bit of elucidation is helpful. Thank you very much.

[Motion lost]

George B. Cuff & Associates Ltd.

M39. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all agreements with George B. Cuff & Associates Ltd. for services provided to the Department of Health from January 1, 1997, to February 17, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and the government I would reject Motion for a Return 39. Again, the total price of contracts is generally public information. Unit price is not released as it would be harmful to business interests of the contractor and could be harmful to the economic interests of the government.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Well, I'm disappointed.

MR. HANCOCK: But not surprised.

MS BLAKEMAN: But not surprised. That's true.

I believe that we were seeking information on how many contracts have indeed gone to this business and specifically for what services. I take the point that the overall amount of money that is contracted out in any category of fee for service is available, but certainly given some of the work that this particular firm has done, it would have been of interest to be able to get more details on the work that they've done and how much taxpayers are paying for it. Disappointing.

[Motion lost]

Queen's University Health Policy Group

M40. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all reports submitted to the Minister of Health by the Queen's University health policy group with regard to Alberta's academic health centres from January 1, 1998, to February 17, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Health and the government I would reject Motion for a Return 40 with the explanation that there were no reports submitted to the Minister of Health by Queen's University health policy group between January 1, 1998, and February 17, 1999. Reports from Queen's were submitted in 1996 and 1997. The reports submitted were paid for by Alberta Health but were developed for the council of academic health centres of Alberta, and this co-ordinating committee should be consulted about the release of the reports.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of Edmonton-Meadowlark to conclude debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you for the advice to try to seek this information elsewhere. I'm sure that my colleague will be following up on this information with all good speed.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Seniors' Research Funding Initiative

M41. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all proposals for funding under the seniors' research funding initiative received by the Department of Health from January 1, 1997, to February 17, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, on behalf of the Minister of Health and the government I would reject Motion for a Return 41. The seniors' research funding initiative is the responsibility of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research, which reports to the Minister of Health but not through the Minister of Health. The motion for a return was for "all proposals" submitted. There are issues about ownership of proposals that were not accepted, which creates problems for public release of those proposals submitted in an approval process. Intellectual property issues further complicate research proposals and release of those.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of Edmonton-Meadowlark to conclude debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you once again. I sense a helpful hint written between the lines there coming from the member opposite, and we will do our best to follow up on that. I think one of the reasons we've had to do so many written questions and motions for returns is in an attempt to, in some cases, wrestle information out of the government, and this seems to be one of the only legislative parliamentary tools that is left open to us. I am disappointed that the information is not forthcoming, but we will try and follow up to glean every bit of information we can on behalf of the ever eager and wanting-to-know citizens of Alberta.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Child Abuse Research

M51. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing records of negotiations and contracts between the Department of Family and Social Services and the University of Calgary school of social work for research on child abuse between April 1, 1998, and February 17, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Family and Social Services and the government I would accept that motion for a return.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview to conclude debate.

MR. DICKSON: We both thank the minister very much.

[Motion carried]

4:20 Child Welfare Caseloads

M52. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing documentation

completed by the Children's Advocate office on child welfare caseload increases and the effects of the increase on frontline staff.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the government we accept the motion for a return.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of Edmonton-Riverview to conclude debate.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much.

[Motion carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member.

Point of Order

Motions for Returns Moved Collectively

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just as a matter of procedure, motions 53, 54, 55, 60, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, and 70: the government would propose to accept all of those. I wonder, in terms of the expediency of the House, if it might be appropriate to ask the member to move all of those without reading them, just as they're printed in the Order Paper.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House that we could deal with this in this way. As indicated by the hon. Government House Leader, motions 53 through 70 have been accepted by the government. Does the Assembly agree that we should proceed in this fashion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? It's carried.

The chair would request, Calgary-Buffalo, because you will be moving on behalf of Edmonton-Riverview, if you could be specific and go through the motions for returns by number so that we have them for *Hansard*.

Employment Initiatives for AISH Recipients

M53. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing request for proposals for employment program initiatives designed for assured income for the severely handicapped and assured support program recipients since September 1, 1998.

Forever Homes Work Team

M54. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes from the Forever Homes work team meetings between April 1, 1998, and February 17, 1999.

Forever Homes Work Team

M55. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing drafts of the Forever Homes work team action plan identifying policy, practice, training, communication, and resource requirements for the Forever Homes initiative.

Children's Advocate Interprovincial Comparison

M60. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing interprovincial comparison reports from the Children's Advocate office for the fiscal years of 1997-98 and April 1, 1998, to February 22, 1999.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

M64. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing request for proposals for projects targeting women at risk of having a fetal alcohol syndrome child.

Children's Advocate

M65. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing documentation from the negotiations on the role of the Children's Advocate with the 18 child and family services authorities.

Aboriginal Children's Services

M66. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing agreements and arrangements between the 18 child and family services authorities and First Nations bands for the provision of children's services as part of their business plans and operational plans.

Youth Group Care Facility

M68. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the request for proposals on the six-bed group care facility for hard-to-manage youth requiring behaviour management to remediate their behaviours as reported in the article appearing in section B5 of the January 8, 1999, edition of the *Edmonton Journal*.

Youth Shelter

M69. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the request for proposals on the 10-bed facility which would provide basic care for youth requiring shelter with an outreach capacity attached that would serve both children with child welfare status and without as reported in the article appearing in section B5 of the January 8, 1999, edition of the *Edmonton Journal*.

Youth Group Care Facility

M70. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing request for proposals on the six-bed group care facility to provide care for youth with drug and alcohol addiction/abuse issues as reported in the article appearing in section B5 of the January 8, 1999, edition of the *Edmonton Journal*.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Just to carry on in this process, hon. Government House Leader, if you could then in fact respond.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the government and the Minister of Family and Social Services I'd be pleased to accept all of those motions for returns.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wish to conclude debate?

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much for the positive responses.

[Motions carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Speaker thought that she was playing bingo.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M73. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Dr. Nicol that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of correspondence, memoranda, studies, and reports prepared by or for the Ministry of Economic Development and received by the Ministry of Economic Development for the period January 1, 1994, to February 16, 1999, pertaining to financial transactions involving Nomura Asset Capital Corporation, Triple Five Corporation, Alberta Treasury Branches, and West Edmonton Mall.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately we have to reject Motion for a Return 73. We have to do that for a number of reasons. Quite frankly, what they're referring to here, the involvement between the Department of Economic Development and West Edmonton Mall -- the files have been reviewed by the Auditor General, and his report was publicly released last month. This matter is the subject of a lot of legal actions, and therefore it's very inappropriate for me to enter into the dialogue on this. We could in fact be compromising the legal positions that may be coming forward with the legal actions that are before us.

Madam Speaker, *Beauchesne* 428(p) addresses our decision that we must reject the motion for a return because this is a pending trial before a court, and 446(2) is that government documents do become exempt and also because of 446(m), "Any proceedings before a court . . . or a judicial inquiry of any sort." So we are not able to release the information to you. I'm afraid that we could in fact prejudice the case, so we must reject it.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre on behalf of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East to conclude debate.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm disappointed to hear that there would be no information forthcoming. I think that citizens in Alberta still want to hear what's going on. Although the Auditor General's report is available to those that wish to pursue it, I think there were a number of unanswered questions or suggestions that people seek further information in other places as the Auditor General was unable to consider it as part of his report. I think ultimately the people of Alberta still want to see all of this and make their own decisions on how this was done. So I urge the government wherever possible . . .

MRS. NELSON: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Point of Order Clarification

MRS. NELSON: Just for clarification for the hon. member, the Auditor General had full access to all information in the government, so I don't want you to think that his report and his review, which was very lengthy, were not comprehensive, because they were.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister I think is trying to clarify the situation, hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: I didn't hear a citation, so I take it that it's not a point of order, that it was a point of information that's being offered now.

Debate Continued

MS BLAKEMAN: Nonetheless, I'm disappointed that there's no information forthcoming.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion lost]

Aboriginal Children's Services

M74. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of agreements and arrangements between the Department of Family and Social Services and First Nations bands for the provision of children's services for the fiscal years of 1997-98 and April 1, 1998, to February 23, 1999.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, with respect to Motion for a Return 74, I would be prepared to accept that on behalf of the government.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much.

[Motion carried]

Stoney Nation Child Care Services

M75. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing records of the review on the Stoney First Nation's child care services for the period April 1, 1998, to February 23, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the government I'd accept that motion for a return.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

4:30 Imperial Oil Cold Lake Project

M76. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the transcripts of the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board hearing into the application by Imperial Oil Resources Limited for the Cold Lake expansion project that started in November 1998.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With respect to

Motion for a Return 76, on behalf of the Minister of Energy and the government we would reject that motion. I would give this explanation. The Energy and Utilities Board's decision on the application is pending, but transcripts of the hearing are available for viewing on microfilm through information services at the EUB's offices in Calgary, and a hard copy of the transcript is also available for viewing at the EUB's office in Bonnyville.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: I'll have to check the *Hansard* to make sure that I in fact heard what I think I heard, that this information is available but one needs to go to the location and read the microfiche. I wish that they just could've had the motion for a return.

Thank you very much.

[Motion lost]

Treasury Branches

M78. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies, reports, background documents, and memoranda prepared by or for Alberta Treasury or sent to Alberta Treasury for the period December 10, 1998, to February 16, 1999, assessing the feasibility of a change of status and/or privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. DAY: As I've already indicated, for reasons that are abundantly clear, which I won't take up Assembly time in repeating, the government will be rejecting that.

For the sake of expediency -- because I know that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo is always interested in the efficient moving of the items that we have in the House -- I would offer happily, if he would concur, that in one grouping we can reject motions 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, and 88, if he's interested in that. They're all for the same reason of breaching of confidentiality. I would like to give the information out, but we're bound by law, as I said before, on these particular items. If we were doing the agreements again, we wouldn't be doing these, but we did do them, and that's the way it is. If he's interested in efficient movement of the business of the House, he would accept. If he's interested in prolonging things so that private members can't have their day, that will become abundantly clear with his response, and I'd look forward to that.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on that particular request.

MR. DICKSON: I'm happy to co-operate on those motions for returns where there's an indication that the information is going to be accepted. If it isn't, then the Official Opposition has a responsibility and indeed an obligation to set out the reasons why we think that information is necessary. I think that Albertans want to see the Provincial Treasurer stand and offer his explanations.

AN HON. MEMBER: An obligation to waste time, Gary.

MR. DICKSON: Well, look; we're working hard to accommodate on the motions for returns that are being accepted, but I have no interest in giving unanimous consent or encouraging unanimous consent in the fashion outlined.

Speaker's Ruling

Motions for Returns Moved Collectively

THE ACTING SPEAKER: As the chair ruled last time, that unanimous consent was needed, when we in fact did accept a number of motions for returns, I would have to say that unanimous consent would once again have to be given. The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has said that they will not give unanimous consent, so I would ask that we would again return to Motion for a Return 78.

Provincial Treasurer.

Debate Continued

MR. DAY: I think I've commented on that. That's a rejection.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M79. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of correspondence, memoranda, studies, reports, and background documents prepared by or for Alberta Treasury or received by Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1993, to February 16, 1999, pertaining to the involvement of First Boston Corporation in the refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall.

MR. DAY: In rejecting this, I'd like to just advise, related to some information, that certainly I've gone over all the reasons why it would be not only inappropriate but in fact illegal for us at this time to give the information, and we won't succumb to opposition pressure to break the law.

It is interesting because the Member for Calgary-Buffalo often mentions that Albertans want to know. I travel this province fairly extensively on issues related to constituency matters and matters of the government. Albertans are very tough when it comes to matters of government. They want to know on a variety of issues. They ask questions that are straight to the point, and they demand answers. I'm passing this on as a point of information.

On issues raised in these motions for returns, I have not once had a request -- and I'm sure I'll get some. I'm sure there'll be a quick rush to Liberal offices, some phone calls made, some letters, and maybe some people showing up at meetings after this, but up to this point in time I have never been questioned on these particular items. As far as government's involvement in ATB and the broader question of the mall and things like that, yes, but on any of these items on which the Member for Calgary-Buffalo thinks the world hangs and that Albertans, all 3 million of them, are on the edge of their seats, the only one on the edge of his seat is himself.

Now, I know he has some constituency out there, a mysterious one albeit, and it takes extensive travel. He spent \$40,000 talking with all those people last year, more than any other member. He had a record on his travel expense. The taxpaying dollars of Albertans were dispensed for him to travel around that tiny constituency of his to the tune of \$40,000, far in excess of my constituency travel, far in excess of that.

MS OLSEN: What is your point, Mr. Day?

MR. DAY: My point is that the member should be more accurate. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order please. We have the capability within this Assembly for any member to rise and ask another member if they would entertain a question. The hon. Provincial Treasurer has the floor. He is debating. I would ask that we reduce the interjections, do away with the catcalls, and look at the protocol involved in this Assembly.

Go ahead, Provincial Treasurer.

Debate Continued

MR. DAY: I would suggest in fairness that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, unless he can produce this vast list of thousands and thousands who are focused on these written questions and motions for returns -- I would be delighted to see that. I assume he will by tomorrow, but today I don't know if he could. I think it would be far more accurate and fair to this Assembly if he would stand and say that it is of compelling interest to him individually and personally to pursue at great length these questions, which we have already responded to at length, rather than giving the opinion that there are thousands of Albertans gathered outside his constituency office, phoning us regularly, and saying: we need to know about motion for a return and question 98; we need to know that.

Madam Speaker, I've addressed the reasons why we are compelled by law, unfortunately I say -- because I would like to release all of this -- and the orders of the Assembly not to release this information. Having done that, he continues his mysterious invisible globe trot, and it would be of fascinating interest to see today, not tomorrow when he has time to rush out and compile a list but today, that list of thousands and thousands who hang on the results of these particular questions. It would be fascinating, and I have to, for reasons already stated, reject this motion.

4:40

MR. WICKMAN: Just a couple of comments, Madam Speaker. I find it difficult to just sit here quietly and listen to the Provincial Treasurer spout off all around, around, and around the issue. Ideally he would be suited for some type of opposition that we don't even see here in Alberta, some type of opposition that is off in no-man's-land.

Madam Speaker, opposition has a role, and let me refresh the memory of the Provincial Treasurer as he prepares to enter that role someday. Opposition has a role, and the opposition's role is to seek out answers to questions that we feel are in the best interests of Albertans. Certainly there aren't thousands and thousands of people knocking at constituency doors looking for answers for these types of questions or as a matter of fact for most issues, other than those issues that relate to them directly on a day-to-day basis, like health care and education.

Imagine a democratic system that didn't have an opposition, an opposition that would not stand here and ask these questions, particularly if you had a government consisting of a number of members with the attitude that the Provincial Treasurer has when he shows just total disregard for the democratic process. I find it extremely frustrating, his disrespect for this Assembly, his disrespect for the democratic process, and his disrespect for the best wishes of Albertans, and he does not project himself in a very honourable fashion, a disgusting fashion quite frankly.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'll try and resist the provocation from the Provincial Treasurer to deal with matters outside the motion in front of us. I just would want to say this. The Provincial Treasurer has acknowledged that there are many Albertans who have interest in the whole West Edmonton Mall and Treasury Branch fiasco. I'll concede quickly that many of them may not know very much about the First Boston Corporation, but I would think the Provincial Treasurer would want to ensure that any public debate around these issues would be an informed public debate, and a public debate is informed if Albertans have access to the reports and the memoranda and the documents. I trust, Mr. Provincial Treasurer through the Speaker, the good judgment of Albertans, but our job as an opposition is to make sure they're armed with the tools, with the information to be able to make an appropriate assessment.

I'd just come back to what I said before. The statutory declaration that's been sworn by the Premier and may in fact touch on some of these things has never been brought into this Assembly, has never been shared with Albertans. A statutory declaration, a sworn declaration that's untested through cross-examination . . .

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

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

Point of Order Relevance

MR. DAY: Under *Beauchesne*, the reference to relevance. The member started his remarks I think quite appropriately by saying that he would resist the temptation to deal with matters other than directly to do with this particular motion, and now he's straying into that field in which he said that none of the rest of us should go. I would ask that he obey the guidance in *Beauchesne* toward relevance and speak to the motion, which he's struggling somewhat weakly to defend.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: Whether I'm struggling mightily or weakly, the point is that First Boston Corporation and their involvement was part of the review by the Auditor General. That's what I heard the Provincial Treasurer say when he was explaining the report of the Auditor General. It's directly tied in. I don't understand why the relevance, which would be apparent to all Albertans, would elude the Provincial Treasurer. We're talking about the statutory declaration of the Premier, and I'm having to guess what's in there, but I'm presuming, Madam Speaker, that First Boston Corporation and the refinancing would be one of the items that would be identified there because it's in the Auditor General's report.

Now, maybe the Provincial Treasurer helped draft the Premier's statutory declaration. I haven't seen it. Members of my caucus haven't seen it. We don't know what's in there. So it certainly has to be appropriate to be able to talk about it until there's some evidence that First Boston Corporation is not mentioned in there.

Indeed, I'd make this challenge to the Provincial Treasurer: if he's prepared to stand here as a Member of the Legislative Assembly and certify that there is no mention in the Premier's statutory declaration of the involvement of First Boston Corporation in the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, then I'm happy to not pursue it any further.

On the point of order those are my comments.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would ask all members in the next several minutes, as we continue to deal with Motions for Returns,

that we do stick to the relevancy factor. If you in fact do read Motion for a Return 79, I think we must stick to the context in which it is written, and a lot of what has been said here appears to me to be assumptions, which is not proper.

For the fact of what's happened previously with the Provincial Treasurer asking that these motions be grouped together and what happened there, I would ask everyone to refer to our Standing Orders, which are right here, that definitely spell out exactly what will happen for Motions for Returns. In fact if we were to do something different, we would have to look at changing Motions for Returns. We will be going through these one by one. We have several left and some very few minutes to deal with them. So I would ask that we pay due diligence to what we are doing and stick to the facts and debate according to what has been set out in our Standing Orders so that we can conclude this business this afternoon.

MR. DAY: Madam Speaker, always in total deference to your rulings, which I appreciate. If you could pass on a reflection on what you just said, which is a reasonable ruling, if you could get back to us possibly on the issue that any Standing Order may in fact be waived upon unanimous consent of all the members. That's what I was asking for, not an actual change in Standing Orders.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Right. As I stated earlier, hon. members, we did in fact agree to unanimous consent to accept a number of motions for returns that were grouped together. In this case we're not. We're going to have to deal with each one separately, and I would ask that we try to do this in a timely fashion by sticking to the relevant factors as outlined on the written Order Paper.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you do have the floor to conclude debate.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: I think I made the observations I wished to either prior to the point of order or during the debate on the point of order. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Treasury Branches

M80. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any terms of reference prepared by or for Alberta Treasury or received by Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1997, to February 16, 1999, relating to CIBC Wood Gundy's examination of the prospects for a change of status or privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. DAY: Reject, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just make the observation that in the absence of seeing the Premier's statutory declaration on this matter, this becomes an important . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I asked for relevancy as to do with the motions for returns that are before us. If we could stick to that, please.

MR. DICKSON: Just in terms of relevance, I'd refer to the Auditor General's report, which specifically deals with this, and the citations that are in there. I can advise you, Madam Speaker, as you go through a number of these, they relate to Alberta Treasury Branches' refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall, and since it seems the Provincial Treasurer is not clear as to why we'd want that information, I'm trying to explain why the records sought are important. I was making the point that since the Premier's statutory declaration has never been shared with members of the Assembly, we have to pursue the individual documents that we think exist that would give Albertans the kind of information we think they have to have to be able to assess the Auditor General's report.

Thank you very much.

[Motion lost]

4:50

Treasury Branches

M81. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of reports prepared by CIBC Wood Gundy for Alberta Treasury for the period July 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999, relating to a change of status and/or privatization of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. DICKSON: This is a matter of concern to Albertans. This is a series of documents that we believe would inform the public debate about the privatization of Alberta Treasury Branches. We think there are many Albertans in small communities right around this province that would like to have access to this kind of information, and it would help them be able to make their mind up in terms of when the government proceeds to privatize Alberta Treasury Branches if that's something that's going to advantage or disadvantage them.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Madam Speaker, I can assure once again that we respect the views of Albertans on this particular issue. When valuations are done which have certain commercial valuations attached to them, there is not a financial institution in Canada or North America or probably the free world that, indeed, before changing its structure -- and I don't know if ATB is going to change its structure. That is something that we need to consult with Albertans on. But if it were to do that, there's not a financial institution in the free world that in fact would release valuations as they either go to the market, look to a merger, or in fact maintain the status quo. So what we're being asked for here is something financially inconsistent to any other financial institution, but I appreciate the fact that members opposite will raise the questions. It's their democratic right to prolong debate unnecessarily. It's something they have to decide whether that's necessary or not. But certainly they ask the questions, and once again we give the answer, and on those grounds we have to reject this request.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I'm really trying to ensure we don't prolong debate on these, but when the Provincial Treasurer is as provocative as he is, some of those things can't go unchallenged.

The point is this. When a valuation is done, it's done for the client. It's the client who decides whether it's going to be shared or not. In this case the client is not the Provincial Treasurer; it's the people of the province of Alberta. That's a message that apparently

is not clear to the Provincial Treasurer, but that's the point of the exercise.

The people of Alberta may choose to want to see that information, and as long as the people of the province of Alberta are providing a 100 percent guarantee on investments and deposits in the Alberta Treasury Branch, they are the client, so at some point the government has to get past this disconnect between the operations of the Provincial Treasurer and the people of Alberta, who are in effect backstopping the Alberta Treasury Branches. So the reason that's been offered is specious and simply is not a credible excuse.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M82. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of reports prepared by or for the chief executive officer and superintendent/president of the Alberta Treasury Branches received by the Provincial Treasurer for the period January 1, 1993, to February 16, 1999, pertaining to loans and loan guarantees issued by the Alberta Treasury Branches to West Edmonton Mall.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just say in support of the motion -- since we already know what the position is going to be of the Provincial Treasurer -- that he may talk about other lending institutions. I cannot think of another lending institution in this country that's guaranteed by the taxpayers of a province. That means the Alberta Treasury Branches are in a unique position, and it does little good for the Provincial Treasurer to make comparisons with chartered banks or other kinds of financial institutions.

This is the only one I can think of, and I'm sure in his extensive experience he may be able to think of some, but I know of none other that is in this unique position. I think the information here is important for Albertans, and our responsibility is to get that information or attempt to secure it and to share it with Albertans. If the government chooses to deny Albertans that information, it'll be for Albertans to determine what the appropriate remedy is. We're here as their agent asking for it.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Reject.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Calgary-Buffalo to conclude debate?

[Motion lost]

Treasury Branches

M83. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies, reports, and memoranda prepared by or for the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1997, to February 16, 1999, assessing the constitutional validity of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. DICKSON: The reason why this is important is we know that in past litigation the issue has been raised in terms of whether the Alberta Treasury Branches have in fact exceeded the constitutional authority afforded the province of Alberta because it's not a federally chartered bank. I think once again, because Albertans are guaranteeing 100 percent of all deposits in the province of Alberta

Treasury Branches, Albertans are entitled to know what risks they run. A finding of the court that the Alberta Treasury Branches are carrying on any activity that's ultra vires the province of Alberta would be well near catastrophic. It may well be that the Minister of Justice or Alberta Treasury or both of them have resolved this issue, so the question would be: why will he not share it with Albertans? Why will he not share it with Members of the Legislative Assembly?

MR. DAY: The matter is before the courts. We reject it, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wish to conclude debate?

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M84. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes, memoranda, studies, correspondence, and background documents prepared by or for as well as sent to Executive Council, office of the Premier, the agenda and priorities committee, Treasury Board, cabinet, and cabinet committees and subcommittees for the period January 1, 1994, to February 16, 1999, in the possession of Executive Council/office of the Premier relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

MR. DAY: As before and for the same reasons, we reject, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: I'm very disappointed, Madam Speaker, that the Provincial Treasurer would want to shield, would want to hide from Albertans the kind of information that's sought here. If we contrast Motion for a Return 84 with a couple of ones we saw earlier, this is why Alberta Treasury Branch is not just another financial institution. The fact that the government would oppose producing copies of memoranda that relate to Executive Council and cabinet -- I mean, what other lending institution in this country, what other lending institution on the continent would have this degree of political involvement? It seems to me that if there's to be this degree of political involvement, then there ought to be a higher level of accountability.

Thank you very much.

[Motion lost]

5:00 West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M85. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes or notes of those portions of meetings of Executive Council or subcommittees thereof between October 29, 1993, and November 1, 1994, where the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall was discussed and/or approved.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Do you wish to conclude debate, hon. member?

MR. DICKSON: I simply say once again that I'm disappointed and

I expect Albertans are disappointed that their government elects not to share this kind of information with them.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M86. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any minutes of meetings held between the Premier, the former Deputy Premier, the former Provincial Treasurer, the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches, and the principals of West Edmonton Mall for the period January 1, 1993, to November 1, 1994, relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

MR. DICKSON: The reason for this is apparent. If the Premier of the province of Alberta and former provincial treasurers are having communication by memoranda or live conversations with senior officials in the Treasury Branch, Albertans are entitled to know what was said. They're entitled to know what kind of instruction or direction was given, and they should not have to settle for an account by the Auditor General when the Premier has refused to share with us his statutory declaration.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: Madam Speaker, we reject that particular motion on the grounds that that information has already been fully provided to the Auditor General.

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

MR. DICKSON: It'll never be fully provided until the Premier comes in here and tables his statutory declaration in this Assembly.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M87. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of statutory declarations prepared for the Auditor General by current members of Executive Council for the period August 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999, as they relate to the Auditor General's investigation of loans and guarantees provided to West Edmonton Mall.

MR. DICKSON: This perhaps is one of the most important in a whole series of motions for a return relative to West Edmonton Mall. If the Premier and other members of cabinet, past and present, have been prepared to complete a sworn statutory declaration, why would they not share it with members of the Assembly?

This becomes a question and a mystery which grows larger with each rejection of a motion for a return. Why would the Premier -- he owns the statutory declaration. If he prepared a statutory declaration, he can decide what he's going to do with it. Why wouldn't he come in here tomorrow and table it under tablings in daily Routine? We'd be able to eliminate these motions for a return, 90 percent of them, on the basis of today. All he'd have to do is come in and table that statutory declaration.

When he doesn't do that, we're entitled to ask: "What's being hidden here? Why won't he share the statutory declaration with us?" It's a puzzle, and this motion for a return provides yet another

opportunity for the Provincial Treasurer to come in here and share that information with Albertans.

Thank you.

MR. DAY: The Premier's been very clear that he doesn't have a problem actually sharing that information. The Auditor General's advice is that because there are other items in court, in fact there may be an appropriate time and place to do that. He'd be happy to do it today, but on the advice of lawyers, again, and with these matters in the courts, the Premier is taking the advice at this time not to release that. It all will be released one day and he looks forward to that day, but on those grounds we have to reject right now.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. member does not wish to conclude debate, so the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of Edmonton-Glenora has moved acceptance of Motion for a Return 87.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M88. Mr. Dickson on behalf of Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of correspondence, memoranda, studies, reports, and background documents prepared for Executive Council, the office of the Premier, the Treasury Board, the agenda and priorities committee, cabinet, and cabinet committees and subcommittees, excepting court documents prepared by Alberta Treasury Branches, for the period January 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999, by the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General or outside legal firms relating to West Edmonton Mall.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just say in support of this that the Premier should recognize that he may receive all kinds of legal advice in terms of what he ought not or ought to do with the statutory declaration. He's the client; he decides what he's going to do with his declaration. I would have thought and I expect most Albertans would hope that his first concern would be to share the information with Albertans. Those are the people that gave him his mandate.

Thank you very much.

[Motion lost]

East Central Regional Health Authority

M91. Dr. Massey on behalf of Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any and all reports regarding the health facilities evaluations of the East Central health authority done by Manasc Isaac Architects Ltd.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Madam Speaker. I wonder if the hon. member would entertain a request that we deal with motions for a return 91 through 105 as a group. I would indicate that it is the intention of the government to reject the request, and I would provide reasons for it if given the opportunity. They all deal with providing the same type of information, and that's reports regarding health facility evaluations. They just detail different regional health authorities, so it would be appropriate to group these motions if the hon. member were so inclined.

5:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I think maybe, consistent with the first

time we did this this afternoon, I would just ask the Assembly for unanimous consent that we could in fact deal with motions for returns 91 through 105.

All those in favour of dealing with them this way, would you please say aye?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We will in fact deal with them on an individual basis.

The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would only want to proceed with that type of motion with the consent of the member, and obviously the consent isn't there. So we're happy to deal with them on a one-by-one basis, just most ecstatic to do so.

We would reject Motion for a Return 91. The requested documents would require a great volume of time and effort to compile. This motion in addition to the next 14 motions contain voluminous documents. They study 340 facilities throughout the province. The documents were and have been in the past prepared to assist regional health authorities to develop long-term strategic initiatives.

The requested evaluations are in the preliminary stages of review by Public Works, Supply and Services. The Department of Health and regional health authorities will also be reviewing them. They'll be discussed in conjunction with other factors surrounding the facilities they describe. The evaluations are used for long-term planning and are a small part of the information used to develop the future directions of the program.

Without taking any further time, the information that's requested in these 14 or 15 motions, particularly with respect to Motion for a Return 91, is voluminous. The government therefore rejects the request.

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, you know, I did door-knocking twice now to come and represent my constituents. We do have a Standing Order under which we operate. I'm questioning myself today -- and I'm a person who doesn't really stand up that often and doesn't utter words that are insulting or demeaning. So I want to be as polite as I can, but I just have this thought in my mind that I have to state. I go back to poetry that I heard from Rabindernath Tagore. I'm just improvising on that. You know, there are some people in this world, in fact everybody in this world really is born crying, but there are some people who live an entire life complaining. And there are some people who finish a term, leaving office totally disappointed. This is nothing but a policy, a principle that I'm hearing coming again and again. Redundant question after question. So I'm just wondering, you know, what am I doing here this afternoon on behalf of my constituents? And, really, it's a frustration point.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, of course, the chair would have to say that we are dealing with the particular Motion for a Return 91. Possibly you could in fact ensure that House leaders in this Assembly heed your words, and it could be something that could be brought forward as discussion on possibly Standing Orders. We might see Standing Orders change. So I would ask you to continue with that thought.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on Motion for a Return 91.

MR. SAPERS: Yeah; thanks. I take it that debate on motion 91 can now include a discussion of the process for motions for returns?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: No. I suggested to the hon. member that he might in fact want to look to the House leaders, and they could possibly look at some type of agreement.

MR. SAPERS: Right. But entered into debate from my colleague for Calgary-McCall of course was this notion about people complaining and crying. I take his words to heart because I heard the complaint from the Deputy Government House Leader saying that these motions for a return were a waste of time. I heard the complaint that these motions for a return are somehow an intrusion under the parliamentary process. What we have . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. SAPERS: And now I hear members of the front bench saying "agreed, agreed," as though they had total disdain for the legitimacy of questions put on behalf of taxpayers to the government.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have a process in place which I talked about earlier. I think sometimes we forget when we stand up to speak that all members in the Assembly are entitled to their opinion. We did hear one opinion expressed by the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, in which I found that he was somewhat exasperated this afternoon and wanted to state that. I think each of us here is allowed on behalf of ourselves or our constituents to say what we like.

Being that it's quarter after 5 and I believe we have approximately 30 more motions for return to deal with, we should get on with debating the motions for return as outlined in this document.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate you giving members in this House an opportunity to express their frustrations and exasperations. Can you imagine how we feel when the government denies legitimate information requests? Can you imagine how we feel when we see the disdain for the democratic process that is evidenced in the responses from the government? So I appreciate you allowing members in this House to express their frustration and the concerns about the process.

MRS. NELSON: Take a deep breath; you'll feel better.

MR. SAPERS: No. You know, hon. Minister of Economic Development, a deep breath won't make me feel better. What will make me feel better are legitimate answers from the government to legitimate questions being put.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Glenora, you know, you were out of this Assembly for some 45 to 50 minutes this afternoon, and things moved along in a reasonably fast time. Now, I don't think you need to come back in this Assembly . . . [interjections] Hon. member, you are standing here naming certain people with interjections. I have asked this Assembly if we can deal with Motion for a Return 91, brought forward by your colleague the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, which deals with health authorities. I would ask that we stick to the relevance as indicated on this Order Paper and that we move ahead, or I will adjourn the Assembly.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on motions for returns.

MR. SAPERS: So what I take from your intervention, Madam Speaker, is that it's now okay to comment on the absence or presence of members in the Chamber, and I also take from your intervention that if the opposition is vigorous in its debate, the chair will threaten to close down the Assembly. Very interesting rulings coming from the chair, Madam Speaker.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: I will simply direct my comments to Motion for a Return 91 and request that the government is forthcoming with the reports regarding the health facilities evaluations conducted in the East Central health authority. As any member who has visited the facilities in East Central will note, there have been considerable concerns not just about the service and access but also about what was done with the information and how the information that was contained in those reports was shared or wasn't shared. The government, I'm certain, can put to rest many fears and concerns and misapprehensions by releasing the studies.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark to conclude debate.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think it's unfortunate that the government is not able to provide the requested information. The operation of regional health authorities I think is of wide interest to a wide range of Albertans, and the materials being requested here are some of the evaluations of those authorities. I realize that the volume of the material in some cases may be rather substantial, but I think that if there had been the will on the part of the government to provide the information, some way around that particular difficulty might have been found.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion lost]

5:20 Capital Health Facilities Evaluations

M92. Dr. Massey moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any and all reports regarding the health facilities evaluations of the Capital health authority done by Robert Ross Architect.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, this and the remaining number of motions relating to health facilities evaluations for each of the various health authorities are being rejected for the reason that the material being requested is voluminous. In fact, it would be in excess of 282 binders which study 340 facilities around the province, and I suspect we'd have to table the answers in the Legislature, which would mean probably five copies of each of those 282 binders, and that may not even be all of the information.

So I think it's perfectly reasonable for us to reject, and *Beauchesne* in fact even provides a rule, 446(2)(g), which states that "Papers of a voluminous character or which would require an inordinate cost or length of time to prepare" should be exempt from production. So the rules allow for the concept that when you've got this magnitude of information that's being requested by this type of request, it's entirely appropriate to reject the request. So for that reason again I would indicate that this motion for a return is being rejected, as are the additional ones which will be coming up and for which I will not be repeating the argument relating to all of the other health facilities.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. If the government were sincere in wanting to make this information available, they wouldn't have to hide behind the suggestion that there's just too much of it. They could simply move an amendment to the motion to perhaps invite my colleague from Edmonton-Meadowlark to visit with the Minister of Health in his office, who I'm sure must have a copy of all the material, and make it available for that member's review and make it accessible for any Albertans, in fact, who wanted to see it. Certainly members of the Official Opposition would entertain such an amendment. I think it's just a device to hide behind by saying that, you know, the government doesn't have enough photocopiers or access to enough toner for their machines to make the suitable copies. They could certainly still make the information available.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To conclude debate on Motion for a Return 92, again I would hope that if the spirit had been there, some solution to the problem of volume might have been proposed by the government in the interests of making the essence of the information that's requested in this particular motion available. I regret that they have not chosen to do so.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, point of order.

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

Point of Order Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, citing Standing Order 13(2), I wonder if the Speaker would be good enough to explain reasons for her decision to comment on the absence of a member a few moments ago.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, before the Speaker adjourns at 5:30, I will say something.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you.

Crossroads Health Facilities Evaluations

M93. Dr. Massey moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any and all reports regarding the health facilities evaluations of the Crossroads regional health authority done by Rockliff Pierzchajlo Architects & Planners Ltd.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, thank you. I've indicated, as I did before, that we'll reject this question, but in doing so I just want to respond to some of the remarks that were made and would be applicable to this particular motion for a return, and that is that the government should find a way to provide the information.

It's not incumbent on the government to find ways. I don't know whether or not the hon. member who brought forward this motion for a return actually called the minister's office and asked if the

information could be provided. A lot of this information just lands on Motions for Returns on the Order Paper. There certainly has been I think during this session a great attempt to accommodate requests for information by members of the opposition. There's always a great attempt on behalf of this government to provide information to the public that they request that's relevant to the public.

There may well be ways that the information can be provided, but this motion calls for a return, which means that it has to be brought back to the Legislature. It's voluminous material. It would be inappropriate. We reject the question.

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

DR. MASSEY: I take it that that was a rejection, Madam Speaker.

I think it is interesting to note the arbitrariness with which the government seems to decide which motions for returns will be honoured and which won't and the criteria, which seems to shift. I know that in the past -- I think the record of the Assembly will bear it out -- when there have been cases where the material was of such volume that it was going to present problems, there have been proposals by government ministers to accommodate the opposition, provide the information, and to get around the problem of volume.

I regret that in all of these motions that doesn't seem to be the case.

[Motion lost]

Headwaters Health Facilities Evaluations

M94. Dr. Massey moved on behalf of Ms Leibovici that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any and all reports regarding the health facilities evaluations of the Headwaters regional health authority done by Ron Boruk Architect Ltd.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the government I reject the question for the reasons outlined on motions for returns 91, 92, 93.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: To conclude debate.

DR. MASSEY: In concluding debate, Madam Speaker, again I regret that the government has chosen not to provide that information.

[Motion lost]

Speaker's Ruling

Referring to the Absence of a Member

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. members, before I adjourn debate tonight, I am not infallible, and I did say something this afternoon that I shouldn't have. We are not in this House supposed to say when someone is or is not present. I did that in a moment. I do want to apologize to the hon. member and tell him that his colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did a very good job. I do apologize for saying it. I guess sometimes I'm no different when I sit here than when I sit there. So I do apologize if I was provocative.

I do stand by what I said, though. I think it is time that we look very seriously at what happens in this House and the respect we have for each other.

With that I will adjourn.

Yes, hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: I want to thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your graciousness and want to also recognize the difficulty of the position you find yourself in from time to time, and thank you very much for withdrawing the comment.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On that note I will adjourn the Assembly until 8 tonight, and I thank you for your indulgence as we worked through this process this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:30 p.m.]