

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 14, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/04/14

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

Our Father, give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us.

Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by 110 people from Edmonton, Sherwood Park, and St. Albert. They are asking the government

to hold widespread public hearings involving as many existing clients as want to be heard before making any changes to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 112 people from Lethbridge. They're asking

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.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of 147 Albertans asking

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-Calder.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce a petition by some 105 residents, mostly from Hinton, Alberta.

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

The SOS group.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition signed by 132 citizens of Edmonton and area urging the government

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

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition presented on April 12, 1999, regarding the SOS from Edson now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for 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-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled recently be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for 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-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I tabled in this Assembly yesterday regarding increased funding for separate and public schools now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to increase support for children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

head: Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 32

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 1999

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the wonderful opportunity of introducing a bill being the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped Amendment Act, 1999.

Mr. Speaker, this will continue Alberta's position of being the leader in the disabled community in Canada, if not the world.

[Leave granted; Bill 32 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table answers to written questions 178, 179, and 196 and also motions for returns 183, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, and 193.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling in the House the annual report for 1998 of the Safety Codes Council of Alberta. This council works in partnership with industry, municipalities, labour, and government to provide Albertans with quality public safety systems for structures, facilities, and equipment.

Thank you.

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

MR. ZWOZDESKEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a list of the 21 groups, organizations, and individuals who presented their comments, ideas, and suggestions last Friday to the Task Force on Homelessness in Edmonton, which I am happy to be co-chairing with Councillor Jim Taylor. It was a public forum and the presentations were absolutely excellent, and I just wanted to thank everyone for participating in this open, public way.

Thank you.

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to table five copies of the news release and a map of the new Grizzly Ridge wildland park. The Minister of Environmental Protection made this announcement today in Slave Lake. This new park will provide protection for the Swan Hills grizzly bear population as well as arctic grayling, and there is also a wide variety of other wildlife in this new 26,000-acre special place.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, do you have a tabling?

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings. The first is a report from Watson Wyatt, called the Watson Wyatt special agent consultants, with which the Alberta government is familiar. It's entitled Ontario Court Reads Same-Sex Spouse Definition Into Ontario Pension Benefits Act.

The second one is a news release issued earlier today by Equal=Alberta subtitled: Bill 30 hinders employers, denies rights to same-sex employees.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In response to the opposition's rather rude interjections at my introduction to the bill, I have four tablings today. The first one is from the Alberta Association for Community Living, which I quote: "for ensuring the AISH program . . . will remain the most progressive income support program for people with disabilities in Canada."

Mr. Speaker, my second tabling is from the Canadian Mental Health Association, which states, "Our compliments also go the government for the process by which they facilitated input into the changes."

Mr. Speaker, my third tabling is from the Provincial Mental Health Advisory Board, which states, "Thank you, on behalf of mentally ill Albertans and their families."

Mr. Speaker, my fourth tabling is from the Brain Injury Association of Alberta, which states, "The AISH announcement . . .

regarding higher benefits, higher asset limit and extended medical coverage is an important step in assisting the disabled community."

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, I have four letters to be tabled, with the appropriate number of copies. These letters are from organizations that serve members of the disabled community, and they are in large measure commending the minister for making changes to the AISH program, extending medical benefits, and rapid reinstatement. These are favourable changes to the program that are being proposed.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

1:40

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today 57 visitors from Hazel Cameron school in Vulcan, 400 kilometres south of here. It's the second or third time that the school has had the opportunity to come up to the Legislature. Accompanying the students today are three teachers: Mrs. Heather Bianchini, Mr. Dave Boyko, Mrs. Deb Leech. I'm sorry I don't have the names of all the parent helpers, but I know one of the parents, Councillor Daryl McDonald from the county of Vulcan. I can see Scott Mitchell, Diane, some personal friends, Louise, Ron, my son's boss. I can't spot everyone else. I'd like them to stand and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 29 students from the New Norway school located in the Ponoka-Rimbey constituency. They are accompanied by their teacher, Ed Martinson, and parents and helpers Jackie Walkey, Karen Clark, Susan Niven, and Sandy Bright. Today they are seated in the public gallery, and I would ask that they stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you four special guests that are here for the tabling of the AISH amendments. The first one is Bev Matthiessen, executive director of the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. The second one is Tony Hudson, the acting executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association. The third one is Bert Sparrow, chair of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board. The fourth one is Norm McLeod, executive director of the PDD Provincial Board. I'd ask those four to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a constituent of mine who has served with distinction as chairman of the Students Finance Board with many other contributions to our party and to our city. So I would ask if Fred Clarke, who is in the members' gallery, would please stand and receive the warm recognition of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Calgary Catholic School Board

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary board of education, \$35 million. Edmonton public school board, \$20 million. These are deficits being registered by our school boards while the government insists that its level of support for education is adequate. Now the Calgary Catholic board is projecting a \$1.5 million deficit and in an effort to control costs has requested that starting Monday, substitute teachers not be brought in unless a teacher's absence exceeds two days, and 15 percent of school budgets are to be clawed back. My questions are to the Premier. Given that the request of the bishop of Calgary that Catholic parents not depend upon gambling fund-raising to pay for their children's education, exactly what is this government suggesting that teachers and parents do to comply with the 15 percent claw-backs? Are they to cut textbooks, cut libraries, or cut computers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would simply remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that this government has committed \$600 million over the next three years to education, on top of hundreds of millions of dollars that have been previously committed. Again, we would ask all school boards to do what they can to live within those budgets.

That is a substantial amount of extra funding, Mr. Speaker. After extensive consultation and examination of the situation, it was deemed by this government through its budget process that this would be an amount that would be adequate to address at least the three-year needs of schools in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if substitute teachers can no longer be afforded, what exactly are schools supposed to do with students whose teachers are missing? Is government saying that classes of 60 to 70 students are adequate?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, we budget an amount of money that is deemed to be sufficient to address the educational needs of students in this province. If individual school boards are having problems relative to their budgetary processes, then I'm sure that the Department of Education is there to work with these school boards to determine how the money can be managed well in the interests of the students.

With respect to the specifics, I believe, relative to the Calgary Catholic board, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we're of course prepared to help the Calgary Catholic school board, which I think is a very good school board -- I'll say that at the outset -- to deal with their deficit situation. We've done our part with respect to the reinvestment of moneys, as the Premier indicated, over the next three years an additional \$600 million.

That would bring our total reinvestment from the 1995-96 year through to the year 2001-2002 to nearly a billion dollars. I think it's roughly \$980 million, Mr. Speaker. That's 36 percent over a six-year period. That is much greater than the rate of inflation and greater than the rate of growth of the number of students put together.

So, Mr. Speaker, if school boards are having some difficulty in making sure that they do not spend more than they have, then we'll be prepared to help them with plans to ensure that they can bring their expenditures back in line with the resources that are allocated to them.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this government's three-

year funding plan for education is so adequate, then why is the Calgary Catholic board projecting an \$8 million to \$9 million deficit for the next school year?

MR. KLEIN: I'll have the hon. minister supplement, but as he pointed out, \$980 million, almost one billion dollars, Mr. Speaker. That is a lot of cash: 36 percent over six years on average. That is a very substantial percentage increase over each of those six years: 6 percent. That is more than the anticipated rate of inflation.

As I said previously, if there are problems relative to individual school boards -- and I would point out that some school boards and some school districts in this province actually are running surpluses, Mr. Speaker -- then as I said previously, the minister and his officials within the department would be very happy to work with the school boards to help them with their budgetary problems.

Again, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I don't have much to say beyond the fact that I will live up to the commitment that the Premier has made that we will work with school boards, because again there are many excellent school boards in this province. They also want to live within their means, and we'll help them in any way that we can with respect to ensuring that they put plans in place.

As the experience of this province has been, once you get into a deficit situation, you end up spending money on interest charges and such, and it makes it very difficult to get back into the black. So our best efforts, Mr. Speaker, will always be made to preventing school boards from getting in the red in the first place.

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

Niton Central School

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, this government's shortchanging of young Albertans isn't restricted to Calgary. Parents and teachers in Niton Junction, just out on highway 16, are concerned about their government's undermining of their children's and our province's future. In the words of one student who faxed me just a few days ago, "The Alberta Government needs to seriously evaluate what it is doing to the education system." My questions are to the Premier. Is it acceptable to this government to have a grade 5 student attend a split 5/6 classroom of 29 students in the morning and a 4/5/6 split classroom of 37 students in the afternoon?

1:50

MR. KLEIN: You know, Mr. Speaker, relative to the question of the student/teacher ratio, I'll have the hon. minister again supplement.

Mr. Speaker, I was at a school this morning, a marvelous school, dedicated teachers. There were 12 children in the classroom, all special-needs kids, grades 4, 5, and 6. Twelve. Two teachers for those special-needs kids. The one teacher said to me: you know, we couldn't have done this and we couldn't have devoted the attention that we're now able to devote to these children had not the government -- and it was in last year's budget -- stepped in to clearly identify and designate funds for special-needs education.

Those kids were happy. They now have an opportunity to reach their fullest potential, Mr. Speaker, and there were absolutely no complaints whatsoever from the teachers or the children. It was one of the happiest schools I've ever been in, and it was such a delight to see how these teachers have devoted themselves to make sure that these kids, all with special needs, reach their potential in the future.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I can understand why the Premier

wouldn't want to answer the question, but how is a single teacher supposed to teach three different math programs simultaneously in one classroom?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I will have the hon. minister supplement, but here was a case today where a teacher is teaching not only three separate math classes, albeit 12 children, but children with very special needs and is coping very well indeed.

Relative to the situation to which the hon. member alludes, I'll have the minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I too have received correspondence from Niton, and I've read through that correspondence carefully. I would say that the resources that are devoted to the students in Niton are the same resources that are devoted to students in other parts of the province. As the hon. member knows and members of this Assembly need not be reminded, the same instructional grant rate goes to every single student in the province of Alberta. That instructional grant rate is approximately \$4,000 per student, so a classroom size of 26 would receive instructional resources approximately equal to \$100,000.

With respect to the decisions, they are made at a site-based level, Mr. Speaker. I'm confident that the principal and the administrators that are responsible for Niton school and the administrators and trustees from that particular school division will have the best interests of students in mind in making decisions for how to best use the resources that are devoted to the students in such a way. In some cases that may mean split classes.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that in my observation of being in schools in other parts of the province, split classes are not always a bad idea. In fact, there can be a great deal of good that can come from teaching in a split class situation.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'm confident that the parents and the teachers will work in the best interests of students in the Niton school, as they do throughout that jurisdiction.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Niton school is being told that it will have to cut four out of its 14 current teaching positions for next year, what will this government do now to prevent further degradation of public education in the Niton Junction area?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've responded by making our investment in education starting in September of this year, a 3 percent increase to the basic instructional grant. That, combined with a number of other areas where there is money being devoted, will result in a 7 percent increase in the 1999-2000 school year. That should provide some help for schools like Niton school.

Over and above that, Mr. Speaker, I'm not familiar with the particular plans as alluded to by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I have seen situations where schools have made plans to reduce teaching staff, but it's because there's been a reduced number of students. I'm not sure if that's the case with Niton. I'd be happy to look into that for her.

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

Child Hunger

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 45,000 children in the Premier's hometown are hungry; 40,000 children in Edmonton are hungry or at risk of malnutrition. While the Social Development Act in Alberta requires that no person shall be denied the basic necessities,

reports link appallingly low welfare rates as a contributing factor to these children starving. My questions are to the Premier. Is there, Mr. Premier, a child hunger problem in Alberta? Yes or no.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, certainly there are some problems. There are always going to be problems relative to hunger even in a land of plenty and during a time of prosperity when unemployment is at an all-time low. That is a simple fact of life, and it's sad. But to say that there are 45,000 starving children is irresponsible. It is not true.

It is absolutely not true, and to use Calgary as an example -- and I'll have the hon. Minister of Family and Social Services respond -- to use those figures as an example, Mr. Speaker, I said last week and I'll repeat today that I question very seriously the methodology that was used. There was an assumption made that just because children are in welfare families, they are going hungry. That is an insult to many people who want to find work, who through perhaps no fault of their own are on welfare but do take tremendous responsibility to make sure that their children have a well-balanced meal at least three times a day.

I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the Premier is referencing -- if I may quote directly from the document *Feed the Children: A Report on Child Hunger in Calgary*, it says:

Unmet Persistent Hunger Needs

The number of children who live in households where Supports for Independence is the source of income is an indirect indicator of the number of children in Calgary who experience persistent hunger which is not satisfied.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, to tell you the ludicrousness of that statement, we could say on our side that because the SFI rates in 1993 were 25,000 and they're now 8,000, we have decreased hunger by 300 percent. We realize that that isn't true.

MRS. SLOAN: Point of order.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, we realize that that isn't true. So this government, on the other hand, is taking concrete steps to address a very difficult problem. Within the next three weeks on the national scene there will be a document come out called the National Children's Agenda, which will have a measuring and monitoring portion in it. This is a credible, scientific document with credible people across Canada that will be looking at this exact problem.

This is not a problem that we take lightly, Mr. Speaker, but on the other hand we have to have real scientific data on it, and quite frankly, no offence to the mayor of Calgary, this document doesn't do it.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, my supplemental question is to the Premier. Are you saying, Mr. Premier, that the welfare rates in this province are not a contributing factor to children being hungry?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, in some cases perhaps they could be. It all depends how the parents use the welfare dollars. Yes, each and every situation is different, and the hon. member knows that. You just can't blanket say that all people on welfare operate and conduct their family affairs in exactly the same manner. I would suggest that there are many families who are on welfare who really do their best and try their hardest to make sure that their children are well fed. That is a fact also.

So, yes, to say that there are some family situations where indeed there is neglect, that's sad and it's unfortunate. When we find out about those cases, the minister and his staff move in to take corrective measures.

2:00

Mr. Speaker, we try to deal with these situations on a case-by-case basis, but the simple fact is that there are always going to be problems in society. We try to identify those problems. We try to address those problems to the best of our ability.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Are you not in defiance of the law, Mr. Premier, for failing to provide SFI rates that ensure children's basic nutritional needs are met as required by the Social Development Act?

THE SPEAKER: Question period negates opportunities for people to ask for legal opinions.

Calgary Regional Health Authority

MS BARRETT: Yesterday this government launched what I call a coup d'état against the Calgary regional health authority by bringing in Tory insiders Jim Dinning and Rod Love. The government justified this measure by citing a report prepared by the Watson Wyatt Worldwide consulting firm. I'd like to ask the Premier: given that the Watson Wyatt review doesn't even hint at the need to make changes at the CRHA board level or even senior management, will the Premier tell us what the real reason is behind the government launching this coup and bringing in these Tory insiders?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, the real reason is that we want to provide assurances to the people of Calgary and district that we're going to have a well-managed and well-run health care system and health care needs and that services are going to be there for the people when they need those services.

As to Rod Love, basically he's been working with the board for some time now on matters of communications, for some time now, and we had nothing to do with that, Mr. Speaker. That was strictly a board decision. He will stay on to help with the transition. But like the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition I'm surprised that the hon. leader of the New Democrats would comment on Rod Love, because they were buddies. I mean, she used to tell me all the time how much she liked Rod Love and how great she thought he was.

With respect to Jim Dinning, Mr. Speaker, everyone thinks that this is a reward? I mean, get real. He has volunteered -- volunteered -- to take on one of the most difficult jobs in the province and turn it around, and I would remind all members of this Legislature that ostensibly he is a volunteer.

MS BARRETT: Well, for the record, I still like Rod Love, and I won't comment on Jim Dinning.

Mr. Speaker, will the Premier confirm, then, that the reason for these two appointments to the CRHA isn't to facilitate further privatization of health care within . . . [interjections] I'm just asking him to confirm. That's the question. Will he confirm?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will confirm that the changes that have been made relative to the Calgary regional health authority have not been made to facilitate so-called privatization. That I will confirm. I will also confirm that the changes have been made to accommodate a well-run and efficient health care system for the people of Calgary and district.

MS BARRETT: Well, I don't understand why the government is hiding behind a report. That's part of the question. Why is the government hiding behind a report prepared by Watson Wyatt to justify its decision to place these Tory insiders inside the CRHA but

refusing to acknowledge another Watson Wyatt report that says that Bill 30 essentially is wrong and unconstitutional and discriminating against same-sex spouses when it comes to pension rights?

MR. KLEIN: This is really a stretch. We're going from the whole issue of health to . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Minister of Health wants to respond to the health component, I'll have him do so. Perhaps the Minister of Labour can respond to the component that deals with Bill 30.

THE SPEAKER: I think we'll conclude that it is a large stretch and move on.

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Tourism Marketing

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Economic Development. Over the past year or so there has been a lot of turmoil in the tourism industry. Last August the government announced the creation of a new framework to manage tourism marketing and basically doubled its annual investment in marketing efforts. As tourism is a major industry in my constituency, I would like the minister to update us on the status of the new framework and also to have some assurance that tourism marketing is back on track.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. In fact I introduced yesterday in this House the new director of the Travel Alberta Secretariat as well as the co-chairman of the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council. I very much appreciate the commitment that the industry and these players have made to tourism.

The question is very appropriate because there have been a lot of changes in the tourism framework this year. We have progressed substantially along the path of having, I believe, a lead-in marketing strategy for tourism. In fact, we've been able to meet with the Canadian Tourism Commission and have them buy into the process of having a strategic marketing plan across Canada from province to province.

Where we are right now is that as you know, we have bids through RFPs for a resident campaign and an international campaign. The recommendations should come back to myself for approval within the next week or so. We have let out the 1-800 call centre contract, and we are gearing up the visitor information centres to be fully operational and staffed by this summer. So we're anxious to see the tourism trade come through. From all accounts the advertising and marketing pamphlet, which I actually filed in this House a few weeks back, are off the press, and they're out in the community and being distributed globally as we speak.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is also to the same minister. Can she explain how the government's \$16.1 million dollar investment will be spent and what measures are being put in place to ensure that we have a strong return on our investment?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, this again I think is a very important concept. This House approved through our budget process an increase of 55 percent for the marketing of this province. In my opinion Alberta has to be one of the best places to market because anything you want to do can be found within the province of Alberta.

To be specific to the question on the \$16.1 million, \$6 million will be spent on the international profiling of Alberta as a tourism destination place. Two million dollars will be spent on the in-

Alberta resident campaign. Two and a half million dollars will be spent on our visitor information and sales centres. That's an important concept, because I think the first impression is always the most lasting when people come into this province. So we have to have those centres operated effectively and with the proper imaging that we want. We are spending \$1.5 million to image the province, and \$1.5 million will go to the tourism destination regions once their plans have been filed with the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council and approved. There'll be \$700,000 for foreign reps, \$500,000 for research, and \$300,000 for a web site.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary question, also to the same minister, is to ask: what does all this mean for the individual tourism operator in West Yellowhead and for the province as a whole?

THE SPEAKER: Once again, hon. members, we're seeking opinions here, and that's not the purpose of question period.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

2:10

Housing in Calgary

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Meeting the Critical Need for Affordable Housing in Calgary confirms that the city is facing a significant shortage of modest rental accommodation for employed singles and families. It also confirms that there is a shortage of specialized permanent housing for persons who require social agency support such as hard-to-house seniors, victims of family violence, and street youth. My questions are to the Premier. When will the Premier admit that Calgary is experiencing a housing crisis because of this government's policy of neglecting these groups?

MR. KLEIN: No. No, I won't admit that it's because of government policy to deliberately exclude these groups, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I will admit that there is a housing problem in the city of Calgary, and it's related to growth. Many of the people who are looking for housing are indeed employed people or employable people who simply can't find a place to live but would take a private-sector-built home at a reasonable mortgage, a reasonable rent, if they could find those homes. That's one of the problems that is related to growth. That is a fact.

Relative to the hard to house this government has done a lot to address the homeless situation in Calgary, Mr. Speaker. I know that certainly the offices of the homeless society are headquartered at McDougall Centre. We've provided administrative help. We've provided cash up front to accommodate the homeless in the city of Calgary. I would suggest that if the hon. member were to speak to a gentleman like Art Smith, he would have nothing but good things to say about the government's responsiveness and certainly the assumption of government responsibility to help the city of Calgary deal with the problem of homelessness in that city.

MR. GIBBONS: Does the Premier accept the report's premise that the current demand for affordable rental housing in Calgary is not a short-term condition or a pressure point but a long-term problem?

MR. KLEIN: It could be a long-term situation if the prosperity and the growth of the province continue, and we will continue to work with the mayor and city council and other officials in the city of Calgary to address this problem.

Mr. Speaker, this is a problem that ostensibly, I would say mainly

is associated with economic growth, but I would remind the hon. member that notwithstanding some problems related to the homeless, those who are hard to house and those who simply need a place to live, can afford to find a place but simply can't find a place, Calgary still, according to the *Globe and Mail* and other national surveys, is deemed to be the number one city in which to work, live, and raise a family.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Premier, how long do people in Calgary have to wait before this government develops a real plan for adequate social housing? One year? Two years? Three years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, certainly the government has some responsibility, and we've identified the areas where we can help, but there is also responsibility on the part of the city, on the part of the private sector. This involves a co-operative effort, and I can assure the hon. member that we as a government have committed to work co-operatively with the city of Calgary to address this problem.

Supports for Independence Program

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, objectives for a social assistance program should be to provide the right incentives to encourage independence and to give focused help at the critical stage before dependency sets in. The Minister of Family and Social Services, to whom my questions are addressed, is to be commended for raising the earnings exemption for AISH clients. Would the minister advise the Assembly how the AISH earnings exemption compares to the supports for independence earnings exemption?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under the AISH legislation that was introduced today, the earnings exemption will be increased to \$200. Our present earnings exemption on the SFI program is \$115 plus 25 percent of earnings on top of that \$115.

It should be pointed out to the hon. member that there are two distinct programs. The supports for independence program I liken to a trampoline, where people come down and when they're on the bottom, we help them out, get them back into the workforce so that they can be earning an income in society. Mr. Speaker, at the present time we feel that the \$115 earnings exemption is adequate for these people.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will the minister not consider raising the earnings exception level to match the AISH program?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, again, one of the goals of SFI is to keep people on SFI on a temporary basis. We intend to get them back into the workforce as quickly as possible. In an economy where there is an unemployment rate of 6 percent, we feel that there are jobs out there for these people to go towards. The \$115 we feel is a springboard.

Could we raise it to \$200? Could we raise it to \$150? Mr. Speaker, obviously we could. The cost of that would be somewhere in the area of \$20 million to \$30 million, but we feel that that \$20 million to \$30 million is better spent getting these people back into the workforce, getting more training programs for them than there are existing now.

MR. DOERKSEN: My final question to the same minister: are there programs in place to provide skills training in basic areas such as money management, food preparation, and so forth?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member raises a very good question. At the moment there are not any programs such as money management, food preparation, et cetera. What we're actually concentrating on is getting these people back into the workforce. I think quite honestly that the member raises an excellent point, and that is that perhaps it is a money management issue for some people. I will certainly consider that, and I thank the hon. member for raising that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Nursing

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The province of Alberta is already feeling the effects of a nursing shortage as regional health authorities cannot fill vacancies. As a result of the recent government of Ontario nursing task force, recommendations are now being implemented that will result in 12,100 new nursing positions in the next 24 months in the province of Ontario. Yesterday the United Nurses of Alberta recommended that 2,000 more nurses are needed to be hired within the next 18 months here. My question to the Minister of Health is: does the minister recognize that there is a need to hire 2,000 more registered nurses within the next 18 months?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that in conjunction with the announcement of the provincial budget, in which of course there was a significant increase of \$386 million for health in the province -- and the vast majority of that went into the budgets of the regional health authorities. In parallel with that we also indicated that our priority for the use of a very significant part of that money was to go to the hiring of additional frontline staff. I am very pleased to indicate to the Assembly and to the hon. member that the United Nurses of Alberta have agreed with our overall direction in this regard, and I hope that we can work constructively with them to add the appropriate frontline staff to the system of the province over the next year.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. My next question is also to the Minister of Health. What steps is the minister taking to recruit back to this province those nurses that have been driven out by this government's mismanagement of health care?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member indicated in the preamble to her first question, the shortage of certain health professionals, in this case particularly nurses, is something that is felt nationwide as far as Canada is concerned. We have in terms of Alberta launched first of all, as I've said, the directions that I've just covered as far as the budget is concerned. We are also working on an overall plan with respect to human resources for the health care system, of which of course nurses would be a very, very important part.

2:20

There was a previous question in the Assembly a few days ago where both I and the minister of advanced education responded with respect to our priority on making sure there is capacity to train additional nurses in the postsecondary system. So we have an overall approach here, Mr. Speaker. There is no denying that in a number of sectors of the health care system with a growing population we do have future shortages on the horizon, but we're certainly aware of that and working to address the overall problem.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you. My last question is to the minister of

advanced education. Why did that minister not take the nursing shortage seriously and approve the increase of additional nursing placements recently recommended by the universities of Alberta and Calgary?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the member for the question. Our access fund, which we use now as a department, allows us to respond to particular requests that we get. The member has pointed out a couple of requests. We feel of course that being stewards of taxpayers' money, we have to look at the best proposals that we receive, and we reacted in what we think was a very positive manner.

Our business plan, as the member knows, is a living document. Certainly the institutions that are mentioned can come forward really at any time under our access funding, and based on the information that certainly the Department of Health is providing and that is being provided to this House, I'm sure you'll find that we'll be able to respond in an adequate and a timely way.

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

Northern River Basins Study

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 12 the management committee of the northern river basins human health monitoring program released its final report. The data shows some rather disturbing incidence levels of several diseases, but the committee says that it did not have enough information to establish causes. On behalf of my constituents I have questions to the Minister of Health. Firstly, did the terms of reference prevent the committee from ascertaining the causes with regard to the incidence of higher levels of certain diseases?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly this particular study is very important to northern Alberta, and I would like to just say two preliminary things before addressing the question very directly. It is an opportunity for me as minister on behalf of government to thank the people that worked on this report, because it was a major undertaking requiring a great deal of dedication over the past number of years quite frankly.

The terms of reference did not prevent the people working on the report from determining causes. However, the overall direction, the overall purpose of the report was to establish the base of information for the northern area of the province with respect to various health conditions, and that will form a basis for being able to address the issues in terms of specific cause-and-effect relationships in the future.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is: when will the minister be implementing the report in terms of its recommendations?

MR. JONSON: The report is quite a comprehensive one, Mr. Speaker. I will be working as Minister of Health on behalf of government with the minister of environment in terms of reviewing the report and giving serious consideration to its recommendations. One of the main recommendations of course is that there be established an entity which would on an ongoing basis follow up on the report and look at some of the possible cause-and-effect relationships that may be there in terms of northern Alberta.

However, finally, Mr. Speaker, I really would like to emphasize that the overall findings of this particular review were that overall the population health in northern Alberta was good.

MR. JACQUES: My last question, Mr. Speaker, is again to the Minister of Health. Given that the environmental representative on the management committee has essentially filed a dissenting opinion, will the minister outline the methodology that was used by the committee in terms of its findings?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, this was a very comprehensive and thorough study in my view. As I recall, a few days ago in the media Dr. Schindler, who's quite well known in the province for commenting on environmental matters, indicated that this was, yes, in fact a very important and very thorough baseline study as far as the objectives in developing information for northern Alberta and the overall environmental situation. So I think the report is a credible one.

Certainly there was an allowance for a minority or dissenting report, but it was a dissenting report involving one individual. It's that person's privilege and right to do so, but the vast majority of the people who were part of the committee and those that worked on the scientific side support its methodology and findings.

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

Pine Shake Roofing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like the rapidly growing airborne fungus, the pine shake scandal has infected the following government departments: Economic Development, Environmental Protection, Alberta Labour of course, Municipal Affairs, Alberta Justice, and science, research, and technology. Unfortunately, Alberta consumers have been let down by every single one of these departments. My first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given the minister's confirmation that her department investigated false advertising in the pine shake industry in the early 1990s, can the minister tell us what occurred and what actions were taken?

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I believe that I said either the late '80s or the early '90s. I don't have that detail. As nearly as I can understand, they were asked to withdraw any reference to approval that may have existed on any bundles of shakes, and the company complied. I will get more detail if required.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's move forward to 1997. To the same minister: given that hundreds of homes were roofed with untreated pine shakes after the fungus problem was discovered, what responsibility does the minister accept for not alerting homeowners, many of whom are in her constituency, and why weren't they alerted about this problem?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I think this Assembly has clearly heard from the Minister of Labour, from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and indeed from all the members that are affected relative to pine shakes that this government is seriously concerned on behalf of the people that have the problem. I think it's abundantly clear that nobody has brought forward any particular proof that this government or any previous government has sanctioned the use or directed the use of pine shakes, and I think that this member continues to try to make that point.

Consumer affairs is working with Alberta Labour on all aspects of program delivery relative to those kinds of things that affect the consumers, as well as the people that are working in Labour, to

make sure that the testing on durability is done. My officials have met with people that have been involved with pine shakes. They have discussed the issues with them. Mr. Speaker, this is a collaborative affair with Municipal Affairs and Alberta Labour and other departments.

Thank you.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Minister of Municipal Affairs: has the consumer affairs division of the minister's department investigated any misrepresentation about the suitability and expected life span of pine shakes or the remedial spray treatment of pine shakes under the Unfair Trade Practices Act.

Thank you.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the Unfair Trade Practices Act is quite a different piece of legislation. It talks about the transaction between the buyer and seller. It does not talk about the products or the durability. That's clear as well in the Fair Trading Act, that we are exploring for regulation to be proclaimed this fall. In terms of durability or in terms of the use of the actual . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Why not?

2:30

MS EVANS: Because quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we have two departments that are already involved in testing. Environmental Protection and Alberta Labour are already fulfilling that mandate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Farm Income Support Programs

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farmers in Alberta and across the country were hard hit this past year with commodity price drops, input cost increases, and weather-related local crop failures. In November of 1998 the federal minister announced that he was establishing a disaster program for farmers that would require provincial participation. My questions today are to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Would the minister of agriculture inform this Legislature if he has yet come to an agreement with the federal minister on their AIDA federal farm program?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As of this moment we have not entered into any agreement with the federal minister of agriculture with respect to a national farm income disaster program. However, keeping in mind that although we don't have a signed agreement with the federal government, we are living up to our obligations under the current farm income disaster program, and we are making those payments to all of the farmers that have claimed under that program.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the observation the hon. member made that it's been a very difficult year in 1998 is certainly borne out by the fact that the number of farmers receiving payment is about 10 times that of last year. At approximately this time last year we paid out about \$650,000. This year we've sent out a little bit more than \$7 million worth of cheques to Alberta farmers.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplementary is also to the same minister. Since other countries in the world don't seem to abide by the WTO agreements, why do our programs have to comply?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, that is a question we hear quite

often certainly about the actions taken by other countries, especially Europe and some of the American states, at least them baring their chests, so to speak, and some of these border tantrums and accusing Canada of not following the WTO. When you look at Canada, farmers today are working against subsidies in Europe of about \$50 to \$55 a tonne on barley, close to \$100 on wheat, and of course a myriad of different programs on cattle and of course some of the things that are happening in the States. They are quite upset especially because we are maintaining and trying to keep our programs within the WTO/GATT green box.

Mr. Speaker, what happens is that as a trading province we export 80 percent of our beef to the States and other countries around the world. If those countries were then to apply a countervail and close their borders to that export, that would wreak chaos on our industry, not only in the beef, the feedlot industry, the cow/calf, all of the barley producers, but all of those people who are working in our slaughter facilities, the trucking companies, the manufacturing and sales, and all of the others, including all the accountants that work for all these various companies. It's a tremendous wealth in job creation. That's just one very small example of the kind of chaos we'll see in this province if any of these countries apply a significant countervail.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last question from our constituents: why can't producers use the three lowest income years in their FIDP, farm income disaster, calculations rather than using the five-year average?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there is a provision in the farm income disaster program that allows for a calculation of 70 percent of the previous three years' margins. We were and are able to use the calculation based on the previous five years, but you do have to take out your best year and your poorest year and then average the three remaining. We ran a number of various trial runs with the farmers that volunteered information to the department, and without a doubt, studying the issue quite carefully, we found that taking the previous three years' average definitely worked to the advantage of the farmers in this province.

We are still awaiting, as I said earlier, the final signing of the agreement. We're looking at what kind of eligibility guidelines may be changed in this national agreement, but I think that Alberta as a province is standing firm on the merits of the farm income disaster program. It's GATT green. Of course, we're always wanting to work with the federal government, but we have to be careful. The way this program is going to be delivered in Canada has to be GATT green, because there are going to be just devastating consequences to this province if there is extreme countervail.

THE SPEAKER: Thirty seconds from now, hon. members, I'll call upon the first of seven hon. members today who wish to participate in Recognitions. During that time frame might we have the opportunity to revert to the introduction of visitors?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: Introduction of Guests

(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: Earlier today we had a delegation from the deep south of the province of Alberta, and I will call on the hon. Member for Dunvegan to introduce his group from the far north.

MR. CLEGG: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's always a pleasure

and an honour and a privilege to get people from God's constituency, the constituency of Dunvegan. Today we have 22 students, one teacher, and three parents. The teacher is Mr. Boudreau, and the parents are Mr. Lefley, Mrs. Sawers, and Mrs. Denis. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: We'll proceed now, hon. members, with the first of seven. We'll proceed first of all with the hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

St. Albert Youth Appreciation Night

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past 16 years the Optimist Club of St. Albert has sponsored an annual youth appreciation night. The two primary purposes of this evening's program are, first of all, to recognize youth for their contributions to society and, secondly, to demonstrate to youth that there are adults who appreciate and who understand them. As we all know, the vast majority of youth is well informed, concerned, willing, and interested in becoming involved in efforts to improve our society.

Last Monday evening I had the honour of attending the 17th annual youth appreciation night at Cornerstone hall in St. Albert. The evening was organized by Dale Smith, a positive and well-respected teacher at Paul Kane high school and a member of the Optimist Club of St. Albert. The students, Mike Kapler and Kristina Brentari, who are co-presidents of the Octagon Club of Paul Kane high school, put together a fine program recognizing the academic and community service gifts of two students from each of the four high schools in St. Albert.

Thank you.

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

Austin O'Brien High School

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of all members of the Assembly I would like to recognize the students and staff of Austin O'Brien high school for their excellent efforts in raising over \$19,000 for international relief.

We cannot emphasize how much money this means when we look at what is happening on our television screens every night. There are children, there are young families, there are old people who are being relocated in a conflict that is so far away from the community of Edmonton-Gold Bar. To understand and appreciate the accomplishments of the students in their humanitarian efforts is very important. We have to realize that so much of this work was done on their own time and under their own initiative. I would like to say that I'm very proud that the students and staff took this effort on behalf of all Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

2:40

Lupus Society of Alberta

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In grade 9 my dearest friend, Bridget Siegel, developed a terrible disease called lupus erythematosus. I'll never forget it, because six years later this horrible disease took my friend's life. Lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease, which means the body's immune system attacks itself, causing inflammation in affected tissues. It develops most fre-

quently in women between the ages of 15 and 45, and 90 percent of the people who suffer from systemic lupus erythematosus are women. The cause and cure are still unknown, but research continues at an incredible rate.

Over the next four days, Mr. Speaker, the Lupus Society of Alberta is hosting a Lupus Canada annual general meeting in Calgary. These nonprofit organizations are dedicated to helping those affected, their families, and caregivers by providing current information, support, and education, regardless of income, culture, or geography.

I ask that members of the Assembly join me in congratulating the Lupus Society of Alberta and wishing them great success.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by the hon. Member for Little Bow.

300th Anniversary of Khalsa

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with a sense of profound privilege and personal pride that I rise today to extend my warmest congratulations to the Sikh community in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada on the 300th anniversary of the baptism of the Khalsa, the exact date of this event being April 13, '99. Although Guru Nānak founded the Sikh faith 500 years ago, in 1499, it was only 300 years ago, on April 13, 1699, that Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th and last master of the faith, created the Khalsa, the brotherhood of the pure. This anniversary commemorates the long and proud history of the Sikhs and their efforts in promoting human fellowship and friendship, social justice, equality, the oneness of the human family, and the universality of the fundamental right of all human beings to live in dignity and respect.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission I'd like to include that Sikhs are celebrating their 300th anniversary throughout the world. Canada Post is bringing out a special 46-cent stamp on April 19 to mark the birth of the Khalsa and the hundred years of the Sikh presence in Canada. A commemorative book, which includes the names and information about the leaders of this community in Canada over the last 100 years and articles on their contributions, is being released on April 17 in Edmonton, to be followed by a Baisakhi procession in Mill Woods on the same day and another public celebration to be held in the Jubilee Auditorium on May 2.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me once again in congratulating our fellow Albertans of Sikh faith on this singularly historical occasion. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, followed by the Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Christie Foth

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to give recognition to Christie Foth from Champion, Alberta. On March 21 Christie was crowned the new reigning queen of the Calgary Stampede. Raised in the Little Bow constituency, Christie has a very impressive background. She's been a member of the Champion Roping & Riding Club, has been involved in horse clinics, competed in the Summer Games, and was also a member of the Champion 4-H multi club for 10 years. A skilled public speaker, Christie was a first-place winner in the United Nations pilgrimage for youth speak-off.

Christie had tremendous support from her hometown of Champion, friends, and family, including her proud mom and dad, Connie and Glenn Foth, and her four sisters and brothers. With her warm

smile and wonderful personality I know Christie will do a terrific job this year representing the Calgary Stampede and this province as she and her two princesses attend over 300 functions.

Congratulations, Christie. Have a fantastic and memorable year as the last queen of the 20th century.

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

Law Day

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, April 17, is the anniversary of the signing and proclamation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Although some members opposite have reservations about granting people inalienable rights, we have to recall that before 1982 the major means to implement legal change was through pressure on the government. It is worthy to note that the first Bill of Rights in Canada was passed by the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker, and the first act of the Lougheed government was to pass the Alberta Bill of Rights.

We come from a long political tradition of asserting rights against arbitrary actions. Our democracy is based on the English Bill of Rights of 1688 and the Magna Carta. Sadly, Bill 20 purports to take away from Albertans the right to study such events, which resulted from social change through violent action. This is a reminder of how important the rights entrenched in the Charter are.

I would like to thank all the judges, justices, and members of the bar for presenting Albertans with an opportunity to learn about their rights, obligations, and freedoms through their Law Day programs. The Canadian Bar Association events will be happening at court-houses around the province on Saturday, April 17, 1999.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

Rotary House Seniors' Residence

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to rise in recognition of a group of community-minded individuals in my constituency of Fort McMurray involved in constructing the soon-to-open Rotary House seniors' residence. This is over a \$2.2 million project.

It has been said that a city without a history is a city without a heart. Well, Mr. Speaker, the citizens of Fort McMurray truly have shown their heart in terms of the partnerships they have formed with government, business, and service clubs. Over 60 Rotarians from the Fort McMurray Rotary Club have led this project to the tune of over 10,000 volunteer hours. They have also partnered with other service clubs like the Kinsmen and Kinette clubs, the Royal Canadian Legion, and the Fort McMurray Golden Years Society. Corporate partners have signed on which include Syncrude, Suncor, and especially many of the small businesses within the Fort McMurray region, far too many for me to name today.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to salute the work of everyone involved in this project. A particular mention should be made of the efforts of Mr. Norm Castiglione, the chair; Mr. Adam Germain, the vice-chair and also a former member of this Assembly; their committee members; and also Mrs. Barb Dewar. This project truly is the effort of many people involved in helping our seniors in Fort McMurray.

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

Point of Order
Factual Accuracy

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(1). The Minister of Family and Social Services this afternoon, while referring to a report entitled Feed the Children, made comments that were directly at odds with the facts and citations in this report. Specifically, the report cited that the most accurate measure used to demonstrate where poor children in Calgary live was to determine where children living in households supported by SFI resided.

The Minister of Family and Social Services, in defiance of Standing Order 23(1), used his comments in an attempt to try and twist that reality and suggest that poverty rates in Calgary were not a factor in children being hungry.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Family and Social Services on this point of order.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this wonderful opportunity to descend to the levels of the hon. member opposite.

THE SPEAKER: On the point of order.

DR. OBERG: On the point of order, Mr. Speaker. What I specifically said was that if we use the same rationale as was in the document entitled Feed the Children -- and I quoted, and I will quote for you again:

In this document three indirect indicators of child hunger are utilized . . . The number of children who live in households where Supports for Independence is the source of income is an indirect indicator of the number of children in Calgary who experience persistent hunger which is not satisfied.

I then went on to state -- and I would ask you to check the Blues if it's at all of interest. What I said was that "the SFI rates in 1993 [in Calgary] were 25,000; they're now 8,000." Then you can say, using the same rationale, that since this government has been in power, since 1993, there has been a 300 percent decrease in the incidence of child poverty, in the incidence of hunger needs.

That is the point that I was making on this document. The people over on the other side are talking about statistics. Now I know where they get their data from. If they can honestly stand up here and say that that data is accurate, Mr. Speaker, they don't deserve to be in this House.

THE SPEAKER: Normally we would move on, but this being Wednesday, does the Government House Leader want to participate in this debate on this point of order?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to debate for a very succinct reason, and I'll try to be succinct about it. The point of order was raised under 23(1); 23(1) talks about introducing a matter in debate. We were in question period; we weren't in debate. There's no point of order. The only twisted reality is the hon. member trying to use points of order inappropriately to extend debate and using the opportunity of points of order to bring back questions which were not in debate in the first place because it was question period.

It's inappropriate, Mr. Speaker, and I would ask you to rule that it's inappropriate to use points of order to continue discussion on issues which are more appropriately the subject of questions and answers in question period and of debate when the bills are brought before the House.

THE SPEAKER: Well, the chair would have ruled it was not a point of order two speakers ago but then allowed two speakers to get into it, so that was the utilization of the time.

head: Orders of the Day
2:50

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, and 196.

[Motion carried]

Treasury Branches Year 2000 Preparedness

Q171. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. What provisions have been made by the Alberta Treasury Branches to ensure that an adequate supply of currency will be available to Albertans who decide to withdraw their deposits because of concerns resulting from potential Y2K, year 2000, problems?

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. There have been many reports in the media regarding a potential run on financial institutions in this country and elsewhere as a result of depositor concerns about the lack of ability to access funds after the first of the year. I do not want to do anything that would add any fuel to the concerns that are out there. The concerns, however, endure to the extent that I understand it's very difficult right now in Canada to buy small amounts of gold. Some people are so panicked that they're actually taking cash out and trying to buy precious metals and diamonds and other things.

So the concern is real. I'm positive that the Alberta Treasury Branch is preparing themselves, and I'd hope that the Treasurer will be able to comply with this request for information so that all Albertans can have that assurance.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, this question is somewhat uncharacteristic of the questions that have normally been tabled related to Treasury matters. It is uncharacteristic because it is rational; it is based on some valid concerns. We are not being asked to violate any rules in *Beauchesne*, as we usually are. We're not being asked to violate commercial confidentialities, as we usually are, and it's well based.

There have been concerns, so I'm happy to accept this question and, in doing so, will be indicating in writing that the situation is well in hand from the view of the ATB. The officials we have consulted with feel they'll be able to handle any concern related to this matter. I will table that, and we accept this question.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Treasurer. I like it better when you're clear about whether you're with me or not.

[Motion carried]

**Transportation and Utilities
Year 2000 Working Group**

Q172. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. How many times has the working group established by Alberta Transportation and Utilities disaster services to analyze potential emergency consequences resulting from Y2K, year 2000, computer problems met, who makes up this group, and what recommendations and action plans has the group produced?

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Written Question 172 follows a similar theme. The year 2000 deadline is upon us. We've seen some very positive action coming from government in terms of preparing for Y2K. In fact I'm told, based on the inquiries that I make across the country, that Alberta is ahead of many other jurisdictions. However comforting that may be, that doesn't necessarily mean that we're risk free in this province, and clearly the government recognized that themselves when they set up this working group. I hope that we can get the same level of co-operation from Alberta Transportation and Utilities that we've just received from Alberta Treasury.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the government and the Minister of Transportation and Utilities I am pleased to accept the question. Alberta is, of course, well ahead of the game and certainly well ahead of the country in terms of preparing for Y2K and Y2K compliance concerns. We're very happy to tell the public that at all times -- in fact, I think the hon. member opposite would find useful information on the web sites of Public Works, Supply and Services with respect to this.

So we're pleased to accept the question and to advise both the hon. member and the public of Alberta that Alberta is on course with respect to getting ready for the year 2000.

[Motion carried]

Community Development Year 2000 Preparedness

Q173. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.

What steps have been taken by the Department of Community Development to ensure that all the computer hardware, software, and office equipment used by the department and all of the department's agencies and foundations are Y2K, year 2000, compliant?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to accept the question. At the same time, in the interests of ensuring that information is available quickly, I am prepared to table the answers to that question today. Can I do that?

**Speaker's Ruling
Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, please. There's an interesting point, though, in doing that. What happens if the Assembly rejects the question and you've already tabled it? The hon. minister would be in some difficulty, because the tradition in here is that all the hon.

members who are here also have a vote. While it is true that one hon. member may move a question and another hon. member may say that they're prepared to accept it, it still requires a vote of the Assembly. There would be an assumption here of privilege, I would think, on behalf of a lot of members. They may not necessarily want to.

It's a fine legal point that I'm making. I'm sure that within the spirit of everything else, one would accept it, but I think it's important to be cautious from time to time when one's also a parliamentarian. So perhaps if the hon. minister would say, "Well, I'm prepared to table the question subject to an approval from the Assembly," I think we might solve all the problems.

Debate Continued

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, you rather finished my sentence. If I recollect where I was in my comment, I think I said that I would be prepared to table the answers to these with expediency on the acceptance of this. I was only going to go on to say that the reason I would do this is because from the debate over the past weeks I know the interest in this particular area is in one very important program, and that is the Alberta seniors' benefit program, which is highly dependent on computerized equipment. I want to be able to assure the members of this Assembly, including the member who posed the question, that indeed the Department of Community Development is prepared to ensure that no senior in this province who is receiving benefits under that program will have those benefits interrupted.

So, Mr. Speaker, thank you for your advice and recommendation on procedure, and I certainly accept that in the spirit that it was given. I will accept the question. Should the House accept my offer to accept the question, I'm prepared to lay the question on the table either today or at the first opportunity tomorrow during tablings.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, shall I call the question?

MS BLAKEMAN: Yes.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: We'll now invite the hon. Minister of Community Development to table her response.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased, and I thank the House for the acceptance of the question. I am prepared to table six copies of Written Question 173 so that all members can have the answer quickly.

3:00 Department of Labour Year 2000 Preparedness

Q174. Ms Olsen moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.

What steps has the Department of Labour taken to address the concerns raised in the 1997-98 annual report of the Auditor General dealing with the department's state of preparation for the year 2000; namely, the recommendation to expedite completion of a year 2000 assessment and develop a comprehensive plan to address the problems identified and the recommendation to develop a contingency plan?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, following the sagacity of your wise guidance of just minutes ago, we will accept and table if the House accepts.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Labour, if you wish to table.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tabled is the attached response, the relevant section of *Hansard* from March 18, my remarks during the debate on the Alberta Labour estimates. If more is required, I always encourage the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to use our usual open-door policy.

Pressure Equipment Inspections

Q175. Ms Olsen moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.

How many in-service inspections for pressure equipment items were overdue on March 1, 1999, and how many of these have been overdue for five years or more?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Due to your wise and sagacious ruling of minutes ago, we are prepared to accept and will table the response upon acceptance of the House.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am now tabling relevant sections of *Hansard* from March 18, my remarks during the debate on the Alberta Labour estimates. Again, the open-door policy for further information applies.

Thank you.

Department of Labour Financial Statements

Q176. Ms Olsen moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.

What steps has the Department of Labour taken to consolidate the financial statements of the Safety Codes Council and delegated administrative organizations with the department so that all the costs and outcomes associated with the ministry's goals can be accounted for and the ministry's performance accurately measured?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With alacrity and dispatch in reference to your earlier ruling of five minutes ago we accept, and we're prepared to table a response upon acceptance from the House.

THE SPEAKER: Should I call the question, hon. member?

MS OLSEN: Please, sir.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the attached response, the relevant section of *Hansard* for March 18, my

remarks during debate on the Alberta Labour estimates. Again, the open-door policy applies.

Department of Labour Delegated Entities

Q177. Ms Olsen moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.

What policies, procedures, and processes has the Department of Labour developed to monitor the performance of all delegated entities to ensure that those entities are delivering the services delegated to them in a satisfactory manner and in accordance with the Safety Codes Act?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, as in the penultimate, the antipenultimate, and the anti-antipenultimate question, we accept, and we will table upon acceptance of the House.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the attached response, the relevant section of *Hansard* of March 18, my remarks during debate on the Alberta Labour estimates. If the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar requires additional information, of course I'm always free to be contacted.

Thank you.

Advanced Education and Career Development Poll

Q178. Dr. Massey moved that the following question be accepted. How many people were surveyed by the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development to determine that 72 percent of Albertans in 1996-97 were satisfied under the public satisfaction indicator?

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting; the minister tabled answers to my written questions and motions for returns earlier this afternoon. So I have the answers, and I'd like to thank the minister for them.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member has stood up and moved a motion. So should I call the question?

HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

[Motion carried]

Advanced Education and Career Development Poll

Q179. Dr. Massey moved that the following question be accepted. What number of Albertans were surveyed in the learner satisfaction indicator as illustrated in the 1998-99 to 2000-01 Department of Advanced Education and Career Development business plan?

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for the answer.

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, we accept this question.

[Motion carried]

Community Adult Learning Program

Q196. Dr. Massey moved that the following question be accepted. What stakeholders were involved with the community adult learning program policy review as outlined in the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development's 1998-99 business plan?

MR. DUNFORD: Yes, we accept this written question.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the interests of saving the Assembly some time and in the event that I've already proven that I'm capable of reading a long list and speaking very quickly, I would refer members to page 3 in today's Votes and Proceedings and move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of those noted on page 3 of today's Votes and Proceedings.

[Motion carried]

RHA No. 5 Health Facilities Evaluations

M95. 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 health authority No. 5 done by Roman M. Kujath Architect Ltd.

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

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would reject Motion for a Return 95. The reason for it is outlined on page 868 of *Hansard* as presented by the hon. Government House Leader last week.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Well, it's unfortunate that the minister will not provide the copies of the reports that outline what the evaluations are of the health facilities in health authority No. 5. If you notice, the other motions -- and I will make this argument only once for the sake of brevity and to move the discussion along -- that I have on the Order Paper in my name are requesting reports regarding health facility evaluations as well. As we go through that, I'll enumerate what each one of those is.

In the different regional health authorities across this province this is very important information to be provided to the citizens of Alberta to see what the conditions of the health facilities are in each and every region. This is not information that should be kept under wraps. It is my hope that at some point in time the minister will make this information available in a manner that is easily accessible and understood by individuals across this province. That's basically the gist of the argument with regards to requesting this information.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion lost]

Peace Health Facilities Evaluations

M96. 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 Peace regional health authority done by Stanley Architecture Ltd.

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

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We reject this motion, but I'd like to make a few comments. The information has been compiled and was in the process of being compiled for well over the past year. It deals with some 340 facilities, and there are about 280 binders' worth of material, which is quite a stack of material. The member is not requesting specific information on a specific facility. Quite frankly, if that were indeed a request and it wasn't specific to 340 facilities, I would be more than pleased to oblige the hon. member.

3:10

However, I do believe that she would appreciate the fact that these documents in the past and also currently in the present have been developed to help regional health authorities determine long-term plans with respect to ongoing capital projects. They're also there to give us at Public Works a very thorough understanding of the condition of the health facilities throughout this province so that when we are making decisions with respect to capital expenditures on repair of these, we have a very good base, our priorities are set properly, and we're not putting any facility in jeopardy, nor are we, at the same time, not following a proper process to sequence these capital needs as we go.

Also, Mr. Speaker, most of these particular documents still have not been reviewed by the regional health authorities. As well, *Beauchesne 446*, the high volume of the request. But in addition to that, it would be inappropriate for us to table these documents, as it were, prior to the health authorities having been able to review them and prior to the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services being able to finalize these particular documents. So although I'm reluctant to say no to these requests, these and the subsequent ones coming up, I think the hon. member should reflect on what the request is and perhaps be a tad patient, be in some cases a bit more specific. We don't have anything to hide, nor could we if we wanted to hide the condition of public facilities.

I would ask that she support the rejection of this motion and withdraw the subsequent motions that are dealing with the same topic.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The request to withdraw the subsequent motions is a request that I cannot accept. If there's some way of short-circuiting the process so that we don't need to go through each one, then I ask for the Speaker's guidance on that.

Just to respond to the minister's suggestion that I be more specific on the information that's requested, I thought it was specific in the motion itself where it was indicated "copies of any and all reports regarding the health facilities evaluations . . . done by Stanley Architecture Ltd."

I can understand why the minister would not be comfortable in providing that information prior to the regional health authorities receiving that information. I would be more than willing to receive correspondence or some kind of indication from the minister about when those plans would be available to be reviewed and where the copies of those reports can be accessed by myself, by the Official

Opposition, or by other individuals who might be interested in seeing where their tax dollars are being spent.

I recognize the reluctance in terms of accepting the particular motion, but it still stands on the Order Paper, and I move acceptance.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

WestView Health Facilities Evaluations

M97. 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 WestView regional health authority done by Vaitkunas Jamieson Architects.

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

MR. WOLOSHYN: Yes. Mr. Speaker, the government rejects that motion under *Beauchesne* 446(2)(g).

MR. HANCOCK: Just on a point of procedure, Mr. Speaker, I think I heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark indicate that she would be prepared to accept some advice in terms of how to group questions. We did have the occasion to try and do this on a previous date. I believe it would be appropriate to ask the House if we could move questions 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, and 105 in concert if the hon. member were agreeable and if the House were to give unanimous approval.

MS LEIBOVICI: I have no objections to that, Mr. Speaker. They stand on the Order Paper. If we can move them all at one time -- I think I know what the minister's answer is, though he did give me a little flutter there when he said "Yes" when he got up for Motion for a Return 97. I don't have a problem if we can do that and move them on.

MR. SAPERS: Will he reject them all?

MS LEIBOVICI: It's my understanding that the minister will be rejecting them all, yes.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have before us, then, a suggestion but we also have a vote, though, first. That is the motion with respect to Motion 97, which is before us. We'll deal with 97 first, and then I will make a comment on the subsequent request. Okay?

MS LEIBOVICI: Okay.

THE SPEAKER: The Assembly has before it a request for the acceptance of Motion for a Return 97.

[Motion lost]

Speaker's Ruling Motions for Returns Moved Collectively

THE SPEAKER: Now, as it turns out, on the Order Paper we have motions for returns 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, all in the name of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Now, there was a procedural exchange in the last few minutes whereby a suggestion was made by the Government House Leader: would it be possible to deal with those motions for returns 98 to 105 if they could be, I guess, looped together in one request? The

assumption here is that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark will be moving these. The hon. member nods her head. I suspect that *Hansard* cannot report the nod of a head, but the Speaker will say that the Speaker's understanding is that the hon. member would normally have been rising to move these.

Then one can also assume that all these questions will be directed to the hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services. One has to assume that the hon. Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services would be rejecting all of these. Again, *Hansard* can record that the hon. minister is nodding his head that they would be rejected.

3:20

Now, the hon. Government House Leader has also indicated: with the unanimous consent of all members in this Assembly. This decision cannot be a precedent-making decision. The rights of hon. members of this Assembly are paramount. The rights of private members of this Assembly must always be paramount. Not all private members are here today, so whatever decision with respect to this question today does not become a precedent for next week. If one hon. member of this Assembly who is away today would find that their rights would be violated, then in essence that would be a destruction of the historical tradition of what a parliament is all about.

So only on that condition, that it's unanimous and unprecedented today, the Speaker would then call one question and would word it in such a way: the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark has moved acceptance of motions for returns 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105.

Grey Nuns Health Facilities Evaluations

M98. 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 Grey Nuns hospital and community health centre done by Niels P. Gerbitz Architects Ltd.

Rockyview Hospital Health Facilities Evaluations

M99. 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 Rockyview general hospital done by R.J. Goodfellow Architects.

Lakeland Health Facilities Evaluations

M100. 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 Lakeland health authority done by IBI Group architects, engineers, and planners.

David Thompson Health Facilities Evaluations

M101. 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 David Thompson health authority done by John Murray Architect Ltd.

Mistahia Health Facilities Evaluations

M102. 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 Mistahia health authority done by Christopher Filipowicz Architect.

Headwaters Health Facilities Evaluations

M103. 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 Headwaters health authority done by Burgener Kilpatrick Design International Architects.

Charles Camsell Hospital Feasibility Study

M104. Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the feasibility study of the Charles Camsell hospital done by A.M. Holland architect.

Edmonton Health Facilities Evaluations

M105. 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 in Edmonton done by Wilson Architects Ltd.

[Motions lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M106. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes, memoranda, studies, correspondence, background documents, legal opinions, legal bills, and invoices prepared for the Provincial Treasurer and Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1993, to December 31, 1996, evaluating proposals of Genra Canada Investments Inc. and Alberta Treasury Branches to refinance the West Edmonton Mall.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I move that Motion for a Return 106 standing on the Order Paper in my name be accepted.

Of course, this is a matter that is well known to most members of this Assembly, and it was highlighted in the Auditor General's recent report. I'd just like to briefly speak to the history of why this information is so important, Mr. Speaker, for Albertans to be made aware of.

On September 1, 1993, Genra, which was formerly Royal Trustco, sold \$13 billion worth of loans to the Royal Bank of Canada. Genra retained ownership of \$3.8 billion worth of loans, of which \$1.8 billion were classified as nonperforming. About \$480 million of this nonperforming portfolio had to do with retail shopping loans in Canada. Included in Genra's retail shopping loan portfolio was \$100 million worth of debt on West Edmonton Mall.

According to a June 1994 letter from Genra to the then acting superintendent of the Treasury Branches, Triple Five Corporation approached Genra in June of '93 in its capacity as representative for senior bondholders requesting a refinancing of the debt secured on the mall.

Mr. Speaker, subsequent to that, in July of '93, Triple Five, the parent company involved with West Edmonton Mall, reported in audited financial statements for the year ending on July 31 that an accumulated cash flow amount of approximately \$70 million had been distributed from West Edmonton Mall to other investments of the Ghermezian brothers.

In September of 1993 Genra presented a draft of a restructuring plan to the senior bondholders, the junior bondholders, and WEM. This plan was well documented in the Auditor General's report. After several months of negotiations it was clear that the Genra

restructuring proposal would not be going ahead. During the period of these negotiations, according of course to Genra, the revenues of WEM had deteriorated, and the lenders' perceptions of the value of the mall had declined by as much as 25 percent. That was in their estimation.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

In October of '93 a backup for the restructuring plan was put together, again led by Genra on behalf of all the senior bondholders. This proposal was for a consensual receivership and foreclosure of WEM, which did not go ahead. In November of '93 the Alberta Treasury Branches, realizing its investment in WEM of \$76 million at that date would be lost in any enforcement proceedings against Genra, according to the Auditor General's report, as a result of this and subsequent decisions, Genra and ATB approved the Genra/ATB agreement dated March 10, 1994. This agreement provided for the acquisition of the assets of WEM through a new company.

Madam Speaker, ultimately none of this took place. We know that on February 22, 1994, a memorandum was written by the Premier to the then Minister of Economic Development and the then Treasurer, and that memorandum basically scuttled the Genra deal. It said that no deal with Genra should be finalized. The memo pertained to discussions at a meeting that was held on Valentine's Day of 1994.

The Auditor General in his report raises serious questions about the basis on which the decision was made to scuttle the Genra proposals and for a made-in-Alberta solution to be found. It is very clear that a critical piece of information for Albertans is understanding how the government came to the conclusion that it did. It is clear from all reviews and reports that the subsequent arrangements entered into were of questionable commercial validity, whereas the Genra deal as proposed would have limited the exposure of Alberta taxpayers through Alberta Treasury Branch risk. Yet that limited risk was set aside for much greater risk, which was ultimately adopted.

So it's clear that the government made an interesting decision back in February of 1994, and what Albertans would like to know is the basis of that decision. My assumption would be, Madam Speaker, that the Treasurer, the Premier, other members of Executive Council, and perhaps the Minister of Economic Development at the time would have asked for legal opinions, evaluations, a whole host of information pertaining to the various proposals that were on the table so that a reasonable and rational discussion could take place evaluating the pros and cons of all of those proposals. If my assumption is correct, that the government did in fact seek expert opinion and advice and information before they came to the conclusion to scuttle the Genra deal, it shouldn't be any particular trick for the Treasurer to provide the evidence of such requests by providing copies of minutes, memoranda, studies, correspondence, legal bills, et cetera.

Furthermore, this would not be violating any secrets, would not be violating any confidentiality. The Ghermezians themselves have filed many documents in open court. The Alberta Treasury Branch has launched some lawsuits where other material has been made available. The Auditor General has written a report.

The Premier has said he will answer all questions. The Treasurer has said: no closed doors, no closed drawers in relation to this whole matter. So it's very clear that the government has stated that they want to be open, transparent, and fully accountable on this matter. They can certainly begin to do so by positively responding to Motion for a Return 106.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Reject.

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

MR. SAPERS: Well, I won't say I'm surprised, but I am disappointed. The government has taken many opportunities to not provide information. I regret that, because the questions endure. The longer the government denies to put the material before Albertans, I think the more those questions multiply and the more suspicious people become, not just of the original questions but also the reasons why information is being withheld.

There will be some other opportunities later on today to explore this issue I am certain. I hope that the Treasurer's response to this motion for a return is not indicative of the government's response to subsequent motions for returns.

[Motion lost]

Information and Communications Technology Report

M107. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all invoices billed to the Alberta Science and Research Authority for the design, production, distribution, and marketing of the report entitled Information and Communications Technology, A Strategy for Alberta released November 12, 1998.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. As I understand it, this was the first government report of its type, as it was issued not just in hard copy, paper form, but also on a computer CD-ROM. I think it was a nifty bit of innovation on the part of the minister. I'm interested to know how it was received, the relative costs, and whether or not we've learned some lessons on how we might disseminate this kind of information in the future.

3:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the minister of science, research, and information technology. While I don't think the question asks all the things that the member just raised, insofar as the information that is requested in the question, I'm prepared to accept it on behalf of the government and the minister.

[Motion carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M108. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the October 29, 1993, memorandum from the Premier to the former Deputy Premier and Minister of Economic Development and Tourism relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

[Debate adjourned March 10: Mr. Sapers speaking]

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We were last talking about Motion for a Return 108 a couple of weeks ago.

Madam Speaker, the Auditor General on page 29 of his report reports on the October 29, 1993, memo. I would like to quote the Auditor General's report quoting from this memorandum. In the report the AG attributes the following statement to this October 29, 1993, memorandum:

[Mr. Kowalski will] be the Minister that deals with all aspects of the Government of Alberta's interactions with Triple Five Corporation Ltd. -- West Edmonton Mall. This definition includes interactions between all of our Departments and the above as well as all financial bodies mandated by our government and the above.

The memo apparently goes on to state:

Best efforts to solving their refinancing requirement without subsidies, grants or direct Government of Alberta guarantees.

This October 29, 1993, memorandum is very interesting. It's the only example I can find in any of the reading that I've done and any of the materials that I've reviewed where a minister of the Crown has been effectively appointed to be responsible for a non-Crown commercial entity. We actually have the Premier appointing a minister to be responsible for this business, and we're then told in this memo, apparently, what I see as a rather interesting contradiction. On the one hand, this minister is to be responsible for all the dealings between West Edmonton Mall and the government departments as well as financial bodies. He's also to make sure that the refinancing requirements are met but without subsidies or grants. Now, this is a very, very interesting challenge that the then minister of economic development and tourism was given.

We know what eventually happened. We know that a deal was written in which the West Edmonton Mall received a rather unique financing package involving a \$65 million interest-free loan for 30 years and \$353 million at an exceptionally good interest rate, issued by TD Trust and guaranteed fully by the province of Alberta through the Alberta Treasury Branches. So a rather remarkable financing package that eventually took place.

We don't know for certain what the relationship is between this October 1993 memorandum and that eventual outcome. Of course, if we could actually see the document, Madam Speaker, we might have a better sense.

Now, the document has been widely reported on. Apparently a copy of it was leaked to a journalist in Calgary, who reported on it widely. We've had references in the popular press ever since then. The Auditor General has apparently been given a copy of this report, and several excerpts from the memorandum are printed in the Auditor General's report. What we don't have is the actual piece of paper. I could understand, if this were a document that was absolutely unknown to the public, that the government may say, "Well, you know, we have to claim cabinet privilege," or something like that. In this case we have the document in so many bits and pieces that, again, it just leads to some rather wild speculation about the bits that have not been released.

So I believe it would be in the government's best interest to simply put the document on the table and let Albertans see it in its totality so that we can all begin to appreciate how events unfolded, which started off with a minister of the Crown being made responsible for a commercial entity that was outside of government operation, to the point where the people of Alberta were backstopping a shopping mall to the tune of something in excess of \$400 million.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We have been dealing with this. It was rejected by the Government House Leader on March 10, and the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora just now closed debate.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M109. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of loan and loan guarantee proposals submitted by the principals of the West Edmonton Mall to the office of the Premier and Executive Council between November 1, 1993, and November 1, 1994.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, the *Calgary Herald*, which is a favourite quoted document of the Premier, on Friday, October 30, 1998, in a blazing headline published the following: "Klein ordered mall rescue." The assertion made in this newspaper article is that in fact the Premier and the Premier's office were directly and intimately involved in the financial bailout of the West Edmonton Mall.

Now, Motion for a Return 109 asks for the whole host of proposals that were reviewed or received by the office of the Premier and Executive Council for that one-year period between November '93 and November '94. We can only assume that it wasn't the first offer that the government accepted. We can only assume that there were several proposals that had come forward and that there was careful analysis or evaluation of the merits of these various proposals.

We know that the Auditor General has found no direct evidence of the government's involvement in managing this loan, but we also know that the Auditor General's report is somewhat incomplete. Just as recently as this week it's been discovered that there were more meetings than were enumerated in the Auditor General's report, hundreds more pages of documents than perhaps even he was made aware of.

Madam Speaker, the press has reported that after the writing of the memo from the Premier's office, a proposal was forwarded from the owners of the mall to the Alberta Treasury Branches that sought a \$250 million loan guarantee. The popular press and the Auditor General have confirmed that this request was ignored by the then superintendent of the Treasury Branches, but obviously something took place. There was some discussion. We know that the matter was on the agenda of Executive Council. We know that the agenda and priorities committee met to discuss it.

Since these are proposals that evidently didn't result in government funding, again, having these proposals in our hands, having them in the public domain would allow people to evaluate the series of events that led us to exposure of less than 100 million tax dollars to exposure of over 400 million tax dollars. The proposals would simply help us fill in those gaps. I take it that none of these proposals were actually put into operation; therefore they wouldn't be betraying any commercial secrets for any of the parties involved. If the government has them, then in the spirit of openness, in a move towards getting to the bottom of this whole affair, I would ask that the government comply with this request.

3:40

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the government I would reject this question. As I have indicated on previous questions relating to the same matter, I won't bore the House with the arguments we made at that time, nor will I on other questions on the same subject matter, if we get to them on the Order Paper, bore the House by repeating the same arguments, but I'll make the same comment on behalf of the government.

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

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. I'm very sorry that the Government House

Leader thinks that a discussion of 400 and some odd million dollars is a boring one. I don't take it lightly at all that Alberta taxpayers have been put into this position by a sequence of events, some of which this government is doing its darnedest to keep secret. I would like to believe that this government is true to its word when it says it wants full disclosure on this matter. I just wonder how long it's going to take before we actually see the evidence of that full disclosure.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M110. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents prepared by First Boston Corporation and Thorne, Ernst & Whinney for Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1987, to January 1, 1993, relating to the financing of West Edmonton Mall.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, the First Boston involvement in West Edmonton Mall is very interesting. If we go back into the history of this, what we can determine is that as recently as January 31, 1994, First Boston acknowledged that it was acting on instructions of the owners of West Edmonton Mall. The alternative being put forward by First Boston was to refinance West Edmonton Mall's debt through the sale of bonds or mortgage-backed securities. The plan was that these securities would then be purchased by a single investor. The single investor proposed by First Boston was, interestingly enough, the province of Alberta through the Alberta heritage savings trust fund.

I think this would come as a surprise to many Albertans, that it was actually being contemplated that the heritage savings trust fund, that rainy day fund so loved by Albertans, was being thought of as the mechanism to bail out a shopping mall.

Clearly some evaluation must have been done; some accounting must have been done. We're simply asking for copies of the documents prepared by First Boston that were provided to the government in support of their proposal that involved the Alberta Treasury Branches, the department of Treasury, and the heritage savings trust fund.

Again, since we know that this scheme was never put into operation, we know that no bond issue was issued, and we know that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund did not directly invest in West Edmonton Mall, what possible harm would there be, what commercial loss, what embarrassment to government would there be in making this information public?

It seems to me that once again we have the outline of the picture that's been provided to us by the Auditor General's report, but all the details have been hidden. It's like looking through the lens of an out-of-focus camera, Madam Speaker. The government has provided us with just the barest hints of what happened and is leaving us to speculate about the truth.

So once again I would urge my colleagues in this Assembly to support this request. I think it's a very reasonable request and without peril to the government of Alberta.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Reject.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate. Was that a no, hon. member?

MR. SAPERS: No.

[Motion lost]

Year 2000 Health System Assessment Report

M111. Ms Leibovici moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the year 2000 assessment report conducted for the health system and individual regional health authorities.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As we all know, Albertans are very concerned about the level of preparedness with regard to Y2K throughout the various government departments. I know the government has been working for an extended period of time to ensure that there is readiness within the province as we approach December 31, 1999. I'm also aware that there has been a fair amount of budget provided to the regional health authorities to try to address the needs for replacement and updating of medical equipment and other equipment required to provide health care within this province.

It would be useful for the report that was conducted within the health system and within each of the regional health authorities to be provided to see exactly where the regional health authorities are with meeting the requirements of being Y2K compliant. It would be a terrible disaster if in fact addressing the needs of Y2K and full compliance are not met, especially in the essential services within the regional health authorities.

So I'm looking forward to the government's response. I can see no reason that this report would not be provided within the Legislative Assembly so that we can in fact see what the preparedness is of the individual regional health authorities.

It was not part of the request, but if the government were to provide it, it would also be helpful information to know how much the assessment report did cost the Alberta taxpayer.

Thank you. I look forward to the response.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm certainly pleased on behalf of the Minister of Health to confirm to the House and to the hon. member that Alberta is indeed well advanced in terms of planning for and in fact dealing with Y2K compliance issues. The health area is of course particularly important and has been the subject, as the member well knows through examination of the estimates, of a considerable expenditure of funds in order to ensure that Y2K compliance issues have been dealt with. If there's any further information to be made available to the hon. member as a result of complying with Motion for a Return 111, we'd be pleased to do so.

Therefore, I'm accepting it on behalf of the minister and the government.

MS LEIBOVICI: I'd like to thank the Minister of Health for providing that information, and I move acceptance of the motion.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

3:50

Treasury Branches

M112. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of reports and studies prepared by

Arthur Anderson Associates prepared for Alberta Treasury Branches and forwarded to Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1998, to February 16, 1999, relating to the future operations of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

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

MR. SAPERS: Can I have Edmonton-Meadowlark move this? Well, I'll try, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, Alberta Treasury Branches will face many challenges, and one of those challenges has been put in front of the branch by the government itself. There has been open speculation now for certainly a number of months, if not years, about what the future of the ATB may hold: whether it will be maintained as a Crown corporation, whether it'll be sold, whether parts of it'll be sold, whether it'll be privatized, whether it will be public share offering, whether it'll be folded into the credit union system in the province. There's just a whole host of speculation and possible scenarios that involve the future of the Treasury Branch.

Not so long ago the Provincial Treasurer entered into a contract with CIBC Wood Gundy to do an evaluation of the future of the Treasury Branch. We were told at the time that that study being done by CIBC Wood Gundy was really to see where the Treasury Branches could and should be positioned in this ever changing, topsy-turvy world of financial service. I can't remember the exact words that the Treasurer chose to talk about the CIBC Wood Gundy study, but he did not say that it had anything to do with privatization. However, we've subsequently learned that there were some recommendations along those lines in that report.

We also know that Arthur Anderson Associates prepared some material that led to some statements being made publicly by representatives of the government and the Alberta Treasury Branch, including a comment made on page 6 of the Alberta Treasury Branch's business plan filed for 1999-2002. That document, by the way, is titled, interestingly enough, Recharged & Ready. We're not entirely sure what they're ready for, but Recharged & Ready nonetheless is the title of their report. What they say on page 6 of their report is that all of the uncertainty in the financial services sector translates into new opportunities. That can only lead us to conclude that the ATB is certain of some major changes coming.

In the report they say: "A strategic assessment prepared for ATB has shown there is strong growth potential for a super-regional financial institution like ATB. This assessment confirmed ATB's business direction and also emphasized the importance of moving faster to become more efficient and more sales focused. We're ready to take advantage of every opportunity to grow as an Alberta-based financial institution." I believe that paragraph is directly in relation to the work done by Arthur Anderson Associates. I also find it curious that nowhere in there does it talk about the future of ATB as a Crown corporation. So the material that is in the possession of the Treasurer that talks about the future of the Treasury Branch should immediately be put into the possession of the true shareholders of the ATB, those being the taxpayers and the people of Alberta.

MR. DAY: Well, Madam Speaker, when an evaluation is done for commercial reasons, that is kept confidential for very good reasons, that I would think all citizens, including shareholders at ATB, would understand. If you are looking for an evaluation, whether you want the asset evaluated for ongoing purposes because you're going to maintain the status quo or whether you're looking at possibly divesting in some way, the last thing you do is run around and publish all the information related to the evaluation of the various

portfolios. It's just plain and simple, under reasons of commercial confidentiality. It may well be that at some point in time, when Albertans have given a clear direction on what they want to see happen with ATB, which includes keeping it in its present form, it would then be prudent to release various portions of this study. But to do that prior to that would just be imprudent and not a commercially sensible thing to do. So that's why we reject it, just for those reasons.

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

[Motion lost]

Treasury Branches

M113. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of reports and studies prepared by Deloitte & Touche prepared for Alberta Treasury Branches and forwarded to Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1994, to December 31, 1995, pertaining to lending practices of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, the reason why this information is important to all Albertans was I think best enumerated when the former Treasurer, Jim Dinning, obviously an individual in whom the government still places enormous trust, said that he sat down with the acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches when he took the job -- and I'll remind the Assembly that that was effective June 1, 1994 -- and "asked him to carry out a study with a local consulting firm to look at the lending practices of Treasury Branches." That quote from Jim Dinning can be found in *Alberta Hansard* of March 4, 1996, on pages 351 and 352.

Now, that flows directly from some ongoing work of the Auditor General in which the lending practices of ATB were put into question: the commercial controls around them, the decision-making structure, and how it was in fact that the portion of the loan portfolio that was considered to be risky had grown so dramatically over the years. If it was important enough for Jim Dinning in March 1996 to put that on the record and to say that he needed to sit down with the acting superintendent and get him to do a study looking at lending practices, well, then, Madam Speaker, I say it's important enough to me to find out what it was that Jim Dinning wanted to get to the bottom of.

Now, we know that this report that was prepared was given to Treasury, and we know it had some very specific recommendations. Some of those recommendations have been put into place. I would be remiss if I did not say the following. Number one, the Alberta Treasury Branch management is to be commended for many of the actions they have taken over the last few years. With the new board in place and the new management team in place, Alberta Treasury Branch, I believe, is a well-managed financial institution that is not subject to many of the criticisms it was subject to in the past. I will recognize the efforts of the government to move slowly, to inch away from the kind of direct control, the kind of direct involvement the government had when the Treasury Branch was in fact a department of Alberta Treasury to the point where it is now a Crown corporation with a board of directors. I can't quite say that they're an independent board of directors because they're not; they still exist more or less at the pleasure of the Treasurer. But it is progress. It's moving in the right direction, and I'm happy to see that.

Nonetheless, there are questions about what that review found, what recommendations were in place, and we should be able to see those recommendations so that we can come to some independent judgment of our own as to what else should be done. The lending

practices and the decision-making practices around commercial loans are at the core of many controversies, not the least of which is the scandal surrounding the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

This motion for a return really is in this Treasurer's best interest, even though it may yet again create another headline for his predecessor, the former Treasurer. So I would ask the colleagues present in the Assembly today to vote in support of Motion for a Return 113.

MR. DAY: Reject, Madam Speaker.

4:00

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

MR. SAPERS: No.

[Motion lost]

Treasury Branches

M114. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of reports and studies prepared by Cole & Partners prepared for Alberta Treasury Branches and forwarded to Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1992, to December 31, 1994, relating to the future operations of the Alberta Treasury Branches.

MR. SAPERS: We know that the General Review and Recommendations for Changes, that were tabled in sessional paper 912/95 and prepared by Gordon Flynn, relate to this particular series of studies. I would remind the Assembly that that report was tabled in December of 1994. In that report we're told that

privatization of [Alberta Treasury Branch] is not presently a viable alternative since not only does ATB not have a sufficient capital base but it is in fact in a deficit position.

Of course, Madam Speaker, that has changed. However, the report went on to say that

based on an external study, the net cash proceeds to the government from a current sale of ATB's operations, after injecting the necessary capital to facilitate a sale, would be nominal.

So we know that as far back as mid-1994 the government was thinking about privatization options for the Alberta Treasury Branch. Again, we have the hint of what this whole picture may look like, but we don't have the whole snapshot. This is an historical piece. It's part of the record. Unfortunately it's just not part of the public record.

We know that between 1992 and 1994 the government actively pursued some exploration of privatization options for the Alberta Treasury Branch. We don't know what those options were. We don't know why they were rejected, and in fact, Madam Speaker, we don't even know if they were rejected. Maybe some plan is being played out right now and it's a deeply held secret of the government. Only the Treasurer and the Premier know for sure. I think all Albertans should know for sure. If we comply with Motion for a Return 114, I think we can start to give Albertans the information that they need and that they deserve, in fact the information that's theirs anyway because it was probably produced at taxpayers' expense.

MR. DAY: Reject.

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

[Motion lost]

Justice and Attorney General Trust Fund Agreements

M115. Ms Olsen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all agreements between financial institutions and the Department of Justice and Attorney General relating to trust funds under administration for each of the fiscal years ending after January 1, 1993, to February 25, 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Oh, that's not Edmonton-Glenora. Yes, we'd be prepared to accept on behalf of the government.

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

MS OLSEN: I appreciate the co-operation of the member opposite in expediting this. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Vencap Acquisition Corporation

M116. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of annual and interim financial statement analyses prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1997, to February 16, 1999, as set out under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees procedures manual as it pertains to financial arrangements between the government and Vencap Acquisition Corporation.

MR. SAPERS: I will remind the Assembly that on October of 1995 the province agreed to terms of an arrangement agreement with Vencap Equities Alberta Ltd., better known as Vencap, and Vencap Acquisition Corporation, an indirect, wholly owned subsidiary of Onex Corporation. Pursuant to this agreement the province sold its \$199,989,000 Vencap loan and 4 million Vencap share options for cash of \$166 million in non interest bearing payments totaling \$63,988,000, rescheduled on amended terms as follows: \$11.4 million being repayable January 2001, which will bear no interest, and the balance of \$52,588,000 being repayable in July of 2046, which will also bear no interest. The carrying value of this loan has been adjusted to an amount equal to the present value of anticipated loan repayments. The discount is amortized to investment income over the remaining term of the loan.

Madam Speaker, I'm not sure about the value of this deal to Alberta taxpayers. I believe the information that we're asking for will help us better understand the government's thinking as it sold off this asset, this loan guarantee at a discount, and I would appreciate very much the Treasurer's co-operation in encouraging his colleagues to support Motion for a Return 116.

MR. DAY: I'd be happy to accept that if we could go with the amendment which has been circulated and which involves adding the words . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me a moment, hon. Provincial Treasurer. I don't believe that the amendment has been circulated.

MR. DAY: I understand that's in the process of being circulated. It was tabled, and I think they're just looking at doing the circulation. When members receive it, they'll see that what is being amended

or suggested to be amended, if there's agreement, is simply adding the words "publicly available" after the words "copies of." They're being circulated right now.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'll just wait a few minutes until all members have received a copy.

Edmonton-Glenora on the amendment.

MR. SAPERS: Was the amendment moved?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes. The Provincial Treasurer has moved an amendment to Motion for a Return 116.

4:10

MR. SAPERS: Thank you. This is not the first time that the House has seen this form of amendment. It's curious, Madam Speaker, because the government would have Albertans believe that they provide information and that they are very open when it comes to requests, particularly for financial information. In fact, this government has been recognized for changes it's made in the presentation of government accounts, public accounts, and has been acknowledged as being a leader in this country. So I find it curious that we would get an amendment coming from that same government that's taken such strides to be open, that is really nothing more than the illusion of openness.

Now, I guess I would feel better, Madam Speaker, if the government simply rejected the original proposal. The reason why I would feel better about that is that by inserting the words "publicly available," it would then give the impression to a casual reader that the government is being very forthcoming. Well, if these documents, if this information was publicly available, we probably wouldn't have to come to the Assembly asking the government to pony up the documents, to table the information. If it was publicly available, we would be able to access it without asking the government's permission.

I guess I should be grateful to get what I can, but it's really not good enough, Madam Speaker. As I say, it's a little disingenuous perhaps in terms of . . .

MR. DAY: Does that mean you're left-handed?

MR. SAPERS: That would be ambidextrous, I think.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Maybe the page could bring the hon. Provincial Treasurer a dictionary.

Go ahead, hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: I believe it's legal to be ambidextrous in Alberta.

My point -- and I don't mean to be frivolous about this -- is that when the government puts forward an amendment that says "publicly available," it is trying to, I think, be too cute by half. It's telling Albertans: oh, yeah, we want to be open and comply with information requests. But really it doesn't advance the request at all. So I will be in the very awkward position of having to vote against this amendment. Then we'll have to see what happens on the main motion, Madam Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, do you wish to conclude debate on the motion as amended?

MR. SAPERS: Well, now we know what's going to happen on the

main motion, Madam Speaker. I'll let my comments in debate on the amendment stand. Clearly the government doesn't intend to be forthcoming with this information, even though it's information that I would have to believe to be neutral in terms of the politics. We're simply trying to get to the bottom of how a deal was not only made but how it's being monitored. I really fail to understand the government's reluctance to do that.

[Motion as amended carried]

Expansion of Government Reporting

M117. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of reports prepared by or for Alberta Treasury or sent to Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1995, to February 16, 1999, assessing the feasibility of expanding the government's reporting entity to include universities, colleges and technical institutes, regional health authorities, and school boards.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, this is a long-standing and enduring recommendation of the Auditor General in which the Auditor General talks about financial reporting and the benefits of consolidated reporting. I know that there is an open debate between the Treasury Department and the office of the Auditor General. I will quote from page 7 of the Auditor General's most recent report, his 1997-1998 report, where the Auditor General says the following:

In simple words, I am asking the government to give Albertans the clearest picture of all the assets and liabilities, and all the revenues and expenses, for which the government is ultimately responsible. In my opinion, based on my understanding of legislated responsibility, the reality of the actual operations that I observe, and the accounting standards appropriate to the judgment, the Province's financial statements are incomplete.

That observation of the Auditor General has led to qualified audits of every government department. I believe that the government could well heed the advice of the Auditor General without exerting undue influence over those other entities, whether they be school boards or universities. In fact, I believe that influence can be exerted in other ways, Madam Speaker, as we all know. For example, it's not beyond the realm of possibility that a well-known former senior cabinet minister may be parachuted into an entity like a regional health authority to exert a form of control. So if the government was concerned that they would be treading upon toes, interfering with the operations of these entities, I would suggest that there may be much more overt and Machiavellian ways of exercising the puppeteering skills of government than simply by having an honest and open consolidation of their financial operations within the reporting entity.

So, Madam Speaker, I would hope that the Treasurer would comply with this. Again, we're asking for some documents that take us a little bit back in history, from January 1, 1995, to February 16, 1999. We simply want to know the basis on which the decision has been made to consistently reject the recommendation of the Auditor General.

MR. DAY: I'd like to accept this motion and amend it as has been indicated by what we've passed around. This is an amendment to Motion for a Return 116, amending by adding "publicly available" after the words "copies of."

THE ACTING SPEAKER: That would be Motion 117, hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Sure. Motion 117. The member's good words have sort of lulled me into a state in which my brain has probably moved into the beta state. Sometimes it's better to be in that state than the other one because you have to listen to so much.

On Motion 117, in similarly making the amendment, we strike out the word "copies" and substitute the word "summaries." I would so move that amendment.

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

MR. SAPERS: This is better than nothing, Madam Speaker. However grudgingly it may be given, I appreciate the co-operation of the Treasurer in providing at least summaries of reports prepared by or for Alberta Treasury regarding the need for, the requirement for consolidated reporting. So I'll be supporting the amendment.

[Motion as amended carried]

4:20 Special Waste Management Corporation

M118. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of budgets and financial reports for the period January 1, 1997, to February 16, 1999, required pursuant to articles 9.7.1, 9.8.1, and 9.8.2 of the July 12, 1996, agreement between the government, the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, Bovar Technology Ltd., Bovar Inc., Bovar (Swan Hills) Limited Partnership, 542936 Alberta Ltd., and Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd.

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

MR. SAPERS: Can *Hansard* show that the Treasurer is studying a map of Canada? [interjections] Madam Speaker, would you please call for some order in the Assembly?

Madam Speaker, this is one of those stories that just simply won't go away: the government's involvement with the special waste management facility in Swan Hills. We know that the now Attorney General had a hand in negotiating a rather unique agreement. Parts of that agreement may no doubt come back to haunt Alberta taxpayers. However, we would like to know what the government knows at this point about the action on the agreement, including the articles that I quoted which talk about the reciprocal financial obligations between all of the entities mentioned.

So in the pursuit of openness and the spirit of accountability, that I know the Treasurer wants to be well known and regarded for, I am certain that he will quickly comply with Motion for a Return 118.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The hon. member opposite is well aware, I assume, having presumably been one of the parties which made requests for this information through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, that the reason why the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act request was denied was under sections 15(1)(a)(ii), 15(1)(b), and 15(1)(c)(i), (ii), and (iii) of that act, under the provisions for not releasing information that would be harmful to business interests. Based on a review of the third-party representations and legislation, the head of the public body found that the records contained financial information submitted explicitly in confidence, and it can be reasonably expected that the release of these records would

directly lead to significant harm occurring to the third party's competitive position and result in financial loss. The hon. member knows that, I assume. It's a presumption I'm making, but I think it was probably members of his party who submitted the freedom of information request.

The same information concerning the budgets and financial reports, as I say, was previously requested from Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation on July 7, 1998, and the only difference between the motion for a return request and the FOIP request is that the FOIP request was for a shorter period of time, that being January 1, 1997, to July 6, 1998.

The hon. member knows, before even putting the question on the Order Paper, that the information can't be provided without the approval of the third party. If he wants to go and get the approval of the third party, maybe there could be an opportunity to accommodate him. But I will have to reject this on behalf of the government and the ministry of the environment.

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

MR. SAPERS: Actually, the government does have many options in terms of disclosure of the information; it's not entirely dependent on third-party agreement. But we don't have to get into that debate. The government has made it clear that they don't want to comply with the information request.

For all members' interest, it's not in spite of the freedom of information request that this motion for a return finds its way onto the Order Paper; it's because of it. The Alberta public, members of the opposition, members of the press, in fact, I daresay, members of the government's own backbench, if they cared to pursue it, would find themselves in exactly the same position, where you can have a polite conversation with a minister, you can write a letter to a minister, you can go through freedom of information, you can ask a question in question period, and then you can have another request through a motion for a return or a written question. If the government doesn't want to comply, they will find any excuse, reasonable or not, not to provide the information.

So what you are left with is having to use absolutely every device at your disposal to try to pry information away from the clutches of government. This is information that really belongs to the taxpayers. Instead of the government being forthcoming and living up to its commitment to be open and accountable and putting spirit and meaning behind the Premier's commitment when he brought in the freedom of information legislation, this government is getting more and more and more stingy and secretive. I find that an unfortunate state of affairs, and I think we see the evidence of this here. So the government may find that the opposition and others will be continuing to use every device, with requests coming in every form that we can think of, to get the answers to legitimate questions of absolute interest to Alberta taxpayers.

I regret the tack the government is taking. It's interesting, Madam Speaker. Every once in a while -- and Centennial Food and the earlier form of the agreement is one of those exceptions -- the government forgets the excuses that it's hiding behind for not giving information. Every once in a while as a result of these multiple requests little bits of information actually get out.

So, Madam Speaker, through you to all of my colleagues in the Assembly, rest assured these requests will keep coming.

[Motion lost]

Centennial Food Corp.

M120. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of valuation reports, fairness assessments, workout options, and exit options prepared for or by Alberta Treasury or sent to Alberta Treasury for the period March 25, 1998, to February 16, 1999, pertaining to loan agreements between the government and Centennial Food Corp.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I had mentioned Centennial Food earlier when I was speaking to Motion for a Return 118. We do have some information on Centennial Food. We don't have all the information on Centennial Food that I believe should be in the public domain, and I would ask that the government quickly comply with this request.

MR. DAY: I'm happy to accept that if we amend it by the suggested amendment, which has already been circulated, by which we would add the words "publicly available" after "copies of." I so move that amendment.

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

MR. SAPERS: I'm caught in the same dilemma as I was before, Madam Speaker, and that is that the government says "publicly available." Of course, publicly available information is not necessarily at the root of the request. It's information that's being kept secret by government that is at the root of this request, information that I don't believe should be kept in secret by government. So, as before, we'll take what we can get, but it's not going to add much to the information or to the debate, and I do think that's unfortunate. I think the people of Alberta deserve better.

[Motion as amended carried]

Centennial Food Corp.

M121. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of annual and interim financial statement analyses prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period March 10, 1998, to February 16, 1999, as set out under sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the loans and guarantees procedures manual, pertaining to financial assistance provided by the government to Centennial Food Corp.

MR. SAPERS: On February 28 of 1991 the government of Alberta approved a \$15 million loan through an order in council to Centennial Food Corp. to provide financing for the retirement of an existing long-term loan guaranteed by the province in December of 1988 to facilitate the building of a processing plant in Calgary. We have discussed the terms of this loan agreement before in this Assembly. Motion 121 standing on the Order Paper in my name pertains to this loan, and I move that it be accepted.

4:30

This is one of those deals that keeps on giving, Madam Speaker. I believe I've heard the Treasurer say that it's a deal that wouldn't be done today, but it was done then. I don't think the government can escape responsibility just because it was done under somebody else's watch. In fact, taxpayers are still footing the bill. So I would hope that we'll have the Provincial Treasurer's co-operation in encouraging his colleagues to support Motion for a Return 121.

MR. DAY: Madam Speaker, I want to accept this motion. I also want to offer an amendment by adding the words "publicly available" after "copies of."

In speaking to the amendment, I'd like to possibly alert members to something here. It's known and it can be documented that literally thousands upon thousands upon thousands of person-hours are consumed by this government with taxpayer dollars to get information like this that's requested by the opposition. I have no problem with that. That's part of democracy. I don't know that taxpayers fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the width of the requests that we are flooded with, but we do our best to answer them other than at times when we would be violating rules of confidentiality, rules of *Beauchesne*, rules of commercial confidentiality, which we've always made very plain.

Whether or not the opposition actually looks at the literally tonnes of paper which we send to them for requests for detail in minutia, which again is part of the democratic process -- I'm not speaking against that. I do hope they're sincere in their questions. I do hope they review the material that we send to them virtually, in a year, by the truckload, material which is very rarely ever asked for by constituents.

On this particular one, Madam Speaker, I have offered to make some material available. I am proposing an amendment. If the opposition is opposed to the amendment, what they're saying is that they don't want the material. In that case, if they are going to speak against the amendment -- and I'll look for the Member for Edmonton-Glenora to address this -- they're saying: we're not interested in that material. I will then vote against my own amendment, because I'm not going to ask my officials to spend hours and hours to compile information which they're going to stand here in the Assembly and say that they don't want. I just want to address that, and if any of my colleagues are following that particular plan, we always have free votes on our side. If the member says that he does not like this amendment -- I'll be listening carefully -- I myself will vote against it, because I will not put taxpayers' dollars to work to give out information that members from the Liberal Party are saying they don't even want. I move the amendment on that condition.

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

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Absolutely. I didn't know that amendment moving was conditional, but that's okay. I can indulge the Provincial Treasurer. But I would caution the Provincial Treasurer not to go down the road of questioning the sincerity or the motivations or the intentions of any member of the Official Opposition. I would particularly caution the Treasurer not to try to generate some hostility in this process. This is not a process of my design nor his. This is the process that we have in this Assembly. I would ask the Provincial Treasurer just to deal with it on the merits without trying to go too far afield and talking about truckloads of this and truckloads of that, because Madam Speaker, there were truckloads of something else that were just presented in this Assembly.

What I would say is that we will take whatever information the government is willing to provide, but I am not happy about what I see as a lack of -- I'm trying to think of a word that's not unparliamentary, Madam Speaker. When the government says, "We will make available to you what's publicly available," that is sort of a tautology. That's another word that the Treasurer can look up if he wants to. What it says is: we're only going to do what we don't have to do to make it look like we're doing something; we'll make it look like we're being forthcoming. Now, we'll take it just on the

off chance, as I've said before, that they include a shred, a sliver, a little teeny-weeny piece of information that otherwise we may not have been able to uncover on our own.

So we'll accept the information, but I think it has to be absolutely clear that the motion as amended does in no way reflect the motion as originally proposed. In fact, it is such an outrageous distortion that it borders on violating *Beauchesne* in terms of amendments that may not even be acceptable because it so tortuously changes the intent of the original motion. But it's been accepted by Parliamentary Counsel, so I will live with it.

I just want to make sure that the hon. Treasurer doesn't go home this evening thinking that his departmental officials or the officials in any other government department do their work in vain. We sincerely appreciate the effort and the hard work of the men and women in the public service, and we regret that we have to put them through the work that we do through these multiple requests, but it should be put on the record that the only reason why they are put to that task is because of the government's corporatwide intransigence and reluctance to be forthcoming with the kind of information that Albertans desire.

[Motion as amended carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M134. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any proposals prepared between January 1, 1993, to November 1, 1994, to recommend the use of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund to refinance West Edmonton Mall.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I put it on record earlier today in debate that the heritage savings trust fund was being eyed as the vehicle to provide money, to funnel money into West Edmonton Mall. I believe at that point it was \$250 million. The \$250 million would come in the form of an investment of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Mortgages, in fact securities were going to be offered by another financial institution. The Alberta heritage savings trust fund was to be the sole shareholder. The government of Alberta was apparently considering this scheme.

Now, the fact that it was considered is frightening enough, but we would like to know not only when it was considered, by whom it was considered, why it was considered but also, eventually, why it was rejected. We understand that it was rejected, and that's a good thing. But, Madam Speaker, Albertans deserve to know what happened behind closed doors. After all, it's their heritage savings trust fund, not the government's heritage savings trust fund. So I hope that Motion 134 will be accepted by the government.

MR. DAY: Reject.

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

MR. SAPERS: The rejection and the denial and the hiding of information I guess continues, and that's a shame. I think Albertans are becoming . . .

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

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

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. DAY: Citing 23(h), (i), and (j). It's fair game for the member to comment on rejection and denial, but when he talks about hiding, he is attributing certain motives, which is unfair to do. I would ask that he withdraw that comment.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. As I understand previous Speakers' rulings, I was careful to talk about the government hiding information, not a particular minister, and I understand that 23(h), (i), and (j) talk about attributing motives, et cetera, to individual members. So I wasn't attributing it to an individual member because I don't think it's any one individual member.

In fact, I would venture to say, Madam Speaker, that if it were up to any one member of Executive Council, the hon. men and women on the front bench of government would be far more forthcoming and compliant with these requests, but there is this sort of corporate groupthink that happens when they huddle up behind those oak-paneled walls in cabinet meetings and decide that they have to withhold this information from Albertans. So, no, I won't withdraw it, because I do believe that the government has not done all it said it will do in releasing the information pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall and the government's involvement therein.

4:40

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Sections 23(h) and (i) talk about "allegations against another member" and "imputes false . . . motives to another member." I think, members, that we need to carry on. I have a sheet that goes for another good two pages of motions for returns, and I do think it's imperative to speak to the motion as printed and to keep our remarks that way if we're going to do this in a timely fashion.

MR. DAY: Madam Speaker, under the citation in Standing Orders which provides for a member to ask for an explanation of the ruling. I think, in fairness to you, that is what we have been addressing to date. I acknowledge that. I'm wondering if you could review and have the Speaker also review this, because in fact I think it's up for some interpretation. A member could stand up and say for instance: the government is a liar; members of government are lying, et cetera. So I wonder if there could just be a . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Provincial Treasurer, if someone were to stand up and say that, this chair would rule against that.

MR. DAY: I appreciate that. I simply put that as a request to the chair. I respect your ruling and will certainly abide by that, and if there could be some further look at that particular interpretation, where it's narrowed down to just applying to one member, that would be appreciated.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to finish concluding debate on Motion for a Return 134.

Debate Continued

MR. SAPERS: My remarks were mostly done, Madam Speaker. The motion is a straightforward one. The government's record is getting very impressive, and in a way, at this point, the more the

government rejects these legitimate information requests, I guess the more fuel there is to continue the search for the truth.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M135. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the response prepared by the chief of staff of the office of the Premier to the August 31, 1998, letter from the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches as cited on page 48 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, in section 4 of the Auditor General's special report on the government's involvement in the financing of West Edmonton Mall -- section 4, by the way, is titled Political Involvement. You can find reference to this particular correspondence on page 48. I'm going to quote from the report where it reads:

Mr. Elzinga, Chief of Staff of the Office of the Premier, responded by acknowledging receipt of the letter, indicating that he had forwarded a copy of the letter to me and suggesting that if Mr. Leahy had relevant information he should contact my Office. On November 17, 1998, I sent Mr. Leahy some questions about his involvement in the Mall refinancing. Through his lawyer, he declined to answer my questions because of the lawsuit but instead referred me to his October 9, 1998 statutory declaration. In this document, he indicates that:

"Jim Dinning . . . as my superior was instrumental in the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall."

He also indicates that:

"Jim Dinning, Ralph Klein, Peter Elzinga and Ken Kowalski were aware of the nature of the loan, the approximate amount of the loan and the way that the loan was to be structured."

Madam Speaker, it's clear that the current chief of staff of the Premier's office was involved or at least had knowledge of the refinancing. Mr. Leahy's statutory declaration mentions not just the Premier and Mr. Elzinga but also the former Treasurer, Mr. Dinning, and the current Speaker of the Assembly. I can't speak to the veracity of these comments. I can simply quote them as they are quoted by the Auditor General.

I would indicate that again this is a critical piece of information. The response provided by the chief of staff of the office of the Premier to the Auditor General's request for information is vital. His response to the letter from the acting superintendent is germane to understanding exactly where the government was at in its response to West Edmonton Mall's repeated requests for financial assistance. So, once again, the government has an opportunity to be true to its word and provide through the Official Opposition information that all Albertans would benefit from. I would encourage the ready acceptance of Motion for a Return 135.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With respect to Motion 135, of course, as I've indicated earlier, on the questions relating to this nature, the government will be rejecting the question.

I did want to take the opportunity to just quickly refer to comments that were made in debate on a previous motion with respect to my comments about not boring the House by repeating my arguments. I want to make it clear that in terms of speaking to Motion 135, I do not wish to repeat similar arguments that I've made on earlier motions, not because the questions aren't important but

because repetition of the same arguments of a same nature is not necessary in order to get the House the information they need in order to deal with the appropriate motion. So it's inappropriate, in my view, for a member to suggest that when I'm saying, "I won't bore the House with further arguments of the exact same nature on a very similar motion," that means I don't think the subject in question isn't important or the government doesn't think that the subject in question isn't important. I just wanted to put that clearly on the record as I reject this motion on behalf of the government.

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

[Motion lost]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Madam Speaker, might I request unanimous consent of the House to briefly change the order of motions for returns to deal at this point with motions for returns 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, all standing on the Order Paper under the name of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods? These are motions for which the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development has tabled responses, and if we don't deal with them now, we may not get to them before the end of the day. I have had a brief consultation with the hon. member who is proposing the motions, and he is agreeable to us bringing them forward and dealing with them as a group, if it's the will of the House to do so, in order to get them off the Order Paper. If with the unanimous consent of the House we could do so, I think it would be appropriate to do so now.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay. Very similar to what has been done before, I would ask for unanimous consent of the House so that we can move through motions for returns 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, and 193.

MR. HANCOCK: I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. And 183.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: And 183. Pardon me. Thank you. Does the Assembly concur?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, there seems to be some confusion about the numbers. The list that you recited I don't think was exactly the same list as the Government House Leader's. So if we could just have the list again.

4:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It was my fault, I think, hon. member. It's 183, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, and 193. Is that correct, Government House Leader?

We have carried this, so we will proceed this way.

Year 2000 Compliance

M183. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the year 2000 compliance plan for the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development.

Labour Market and Delivery Programs

M187. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the memorandum of understanding signed in 1998 between the departments of Advanced Education and Career Development and Family and Social Services to redesign provincial labour market programs and delivery systems.

Adult Skills Alberta

M188. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the business plan for Adult Skills Alberta as developed by the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development and outlined in its 1998-99 business plan.

Advanced Education Policy Framework

M189. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the cross-departmental policy framework as completed by the essential skills framework working group for the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development as outlined in its 1998-99 business plan.

Youth Career and Labour Market Needs

M190. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the report on the assessment of career and labour market needs of youth completed by the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development as outlined in its 1998-99 business plan.

Advanced Education Applied Degree Project

M191. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the report on the evaluation of the applied degree project completed by the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development as outlined in its 1998-99 business plan.

Advanced Education Ministry Performance

M192. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the stakeholder survey from 1997-98 to assess how well the ministry is performing its duties conducted by the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development as outlined in its 1998-99 to 2000-01 business plan.

Advanced Education Employer Satisfaction Survey

M193. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the employer satisfaction survey conducted in 1997-98 by the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development as outlined in its 1998-99 to 2000-01 business plan.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you. On behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development and the government and in anticipation of approval of these motions for returns -- the hon. minister has tabled the answers -- I would accept the question.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, and I appreciate the answers that were tabled. I had a chance to scan them, Madam Speaker, and they seemed to answer the questions that were raised.

Thank you.

[Motions carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M136. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes, memoranda, briefing notes, background documents, correspondence, and letters prepared for or by the former Provincial Treasurer and sent to the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches and the former Deputy Provincial Treasurer, finance and revenue, between October 31, 1994, and June 12, 1996, regarding the refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 46 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

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

MR. SAPERS: Motion for a Return 136 of course relates to the government's involvement and interference with the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall through the Alberta Treasury Branch, and thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak to Motion for a Return 136, which has absolutely nothing to do with Kenneth Starr. The repeated bantering of the minister of advanced education going, "Kenneth Starr, Kenneth Starr, Kenneth Starr," makes me wonder if he's sitting there thinking of Monica or what exactly it is that's on his mind. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We have a number of motions for returns here this afternoon. I suggest that we take this seriously, hon. members.

On the motion as printed, hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, and keep the comments down.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It was just getting annoying; that's all.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's fine, hon. member.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. The story is now fairly well known. The growing story, of course, is the reluctance of the government to provide this information, so this is yet another opportunity, Madam Speaker, for the government to provide some more clarity into this murky situation.

The briefing notes and the memoranda called for were apparently provided, at least in part, to the Auditor General. The Premier had said that everything would be made available, so this is an opportunity, of course, for that to begin to happen.

MR. DAY: Reject.

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

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M137. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes, memoranda, briefing

notes, background documents, correspondence, and letters prepared for or by the former Provincial Treasurer relating to meetings with the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches and the former Deputy Provincial Treasurer, finance and revenue, between October 31, 1994, and June 12, 1996, regarding the refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 46 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. SAPERS: Motion for a Return 137 again relates to the government's involvement in West Edmonton Mall. Madam Speaker, similar arguments. The growing issue here is the one for the need of clarity. I believe that eventually we'll get to the point in this province where a form of public inquiry will be held so that we'll get to the bottom of all of this. It is really a matter of the government doing the right and honourable thing now and putting this information in the public domain now when they're not under subpoena or waiting until that day when the government is forced to comply with a judicial order.

MR. DAY: Reject.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. member to conclude debate?

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M138. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes, memoranda, briefing notes, background documents, correspondence, and letters prepared for or by the former Deputy Provincial Treasurer, finance and revenue, relating to meetings with the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches between October 31, 1994, and March 31, 1995, regarding the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 46 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, the former Provincial Treasurer and his office, particularly through his deputy, were apparently intimately involved in discussions and apparently on a daily basis at least had access to information about the operations of ATB and because of that its involvement in the West Edmonton Mall.

Now, we know that the former Provincial Treasurer, Mr. Jim Dinning, through an order in council appointed Elmer Leahy to the position of acting superintendent, and we also know through an order in council, I believe, or through some other ministerial mechanism that the Provincial Treasurer approved a \$124,000 severance agreement for Mr. Leahy about two years later when it was made clear that Mr. Leahy's services were no longer consistent with the needs of the Alberta Treasury Branch. About a year before Mr. Leahy was given that golden handshake, we know that the Treasurer reviewed Mr. Leahy's involvement in the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, and in fact he has said that he became angry when he found out what it was that Mr. Leahy had been up to.

So we know that the former Treasurer's office and we know that through his deputy and others -- they were very involved in this whole chain of events. We just think it would be helpful if the information requested was once again put into the public domain so that people could have a true and honest picture of what the government was up to when it got taxpayers into this \$415 million dollar jam.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Reject.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. member to conclude debate?

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M139. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of memoranda, briefing notes, background documents, correspondence, and letters prepared for or by the former Deputy Provincial Treasurer, finance and revenue, regarding rumours in October 1994 that ATB, Alberta Treasury Branches, was going to guarantee the mall's debt as cited on page 46 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

5:00

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, these rumours are enumerated by the Auditor General in his report, the report that the Provincial Treasurer asked him to do, the report that was based on the Provincial Treasurer saying: I'm not going to constrain you with any particular terms of reference; I want this to be wide-ranging and open. This is a report that was based on the Provincial Treasurer saying: not one closed drawer; no closed doors. This is the report that the Premier said: be patient, stay tuned, stand by; once the Auditor General finishes his work, we'll have all the information.

So, Madam Speaker, it's clear. We don't have all the information, and now we have an opportunity to start living up to that commitment to provide all the information. So one more time to the Treasurer and through the Treasurer to all of his colleagues on the government side: would you please support Motion 139 and help the Premier live up to his commitment to be open and accountable and fully transparent on the government's involvement in West Edmonton Mall.

MR. DAY: Well, I think this really helps to crystalize the seriousness, or lack thereof, of the request from the opposition. Here we're being asked to bring forward documents related to rumours. I mean that is really getting down to stretching, I think, the limits of the intention of what should be a very healthy process in this House. It's just a process of written questions. Using this one as an example, I wonder if the member would be interested in looking at unanimous agreement to group similar requests of numbers -- I just throw this out as I'm addressing this one, and then we could look at an actual motion if he were interested -- 138, 139, 140, 141, 144, 151, 152, 153, 159, 160, 161, 162, 164, 166, 167, and 170. Because as I look at addressing this . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm just going to interrupt you for a moment. We actually have started with the debate and the introduction of Motion 139. Possibly we could deal with this one and then you could bring forward a motion to ask for unanimous consent of the Assembly.

MR. DAY: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just highlighting that many of these requests are generic both in request and in response.

If the member is really serious about the efficient business of the House and also having his democratic curiosity satiated, then I think he could boldly and plainly make the case, if we were to reject these

en masse, that en masse this government has rejected the requests. He could still make the public case of his view that we are somehow launching into the destruction of democracy here, and the House could move on. He could still make his point and democracy, I believe, would be well served.

In this particular one, as he's requested this one solely, I of course have to reject it on the previous argument.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora specifically on the rejection of 139.

MR. SAPERS: Well, it's consistent with the pattern, Madam Speaker, so I'm not surprised. I'd like to quote from the Auditor General's report on page 46; this is page 46 of the 1999 refinancing of West Edmonton Mall special report of the Auditor General. For *Hansard's* reference I will be quoting from a quote, and this is Mr. Dinning that I am quoting when he says the following:

I was involved in a number of conversations in or around March of 1995. I first recall Mr. McPherson advising me that Mr. Leahy had done a deal four or five months before, a deal that exposed ATB to a higher amount and a longer term. Mr. McPherson and Mr. Leahy then immediately called upon me and advised me of Mr. Leahy's "deal." I do not recall if specific amounts were referred to, but I was aware that ATB could ultimately be "on the hook" for the full amount of the debt. Mr. Leahy was contrite, apologetic and embarrassed. I was mad. I advised Mr. Leahy that I would be considering his position at the Treasury Branches and would call him when I next wanted to talk to him. During this time in March of 1995, Mr. Valentine advised me that he had met with Mr. Leahy to participate in a post-audit meeting, and that he had informed Mr. Leahy, upon reviewing the ATB/WEM agreement, that "it looks like you bought yourself a Mall."

Madam Speaker, clearly the government doesn't want the details about those conversations and the records kept of those agreements to be made public.

[Motion lost]

MR. DAY: Madam Speaker, might I request unanimous consent from the House to move that the following motions for returns be voted on en masse and together. It would be the following numbers: 140, 141, 144, 151, 152, 153, 159, 160, 161, 162, 164, 166, 167, and 170. I think the House would be well served. I think democracy would be well served by having these voted on en masse, and then let the Liberals go out onto the streets and the highways and byways and hold up the list and say, "Look what the government hasn't done," and let the people be the judge. They can do that effectively without us having to take time in the House on particular motions. I wonder if they would be interested in that?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Provincial Treasurer, for the sake of the chair and I think probably the table officer here, could you repeat those again? I thought you were calling bingo.

MR. DAY: Yes. I've sent a suggested list also to the opposition critic, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, for his consideration. It would be 140, 141, 144, 151, 152, 153, 159, 160, 161, 162, 164, 166, 167, and 170.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer has moved that we amalgamate a number of the motions for returns -- numbers 140, 141, 144, 151, 152, 153, 159, 160, 161, 162, 164, 166, 167, 170 -- and deal with them as one grouping. I would need the unanimous consent of the House to do this. Pardon?

MR. SAPERS: It's a debatable motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: But first we have to put it to the Assembly.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, no, no.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I mean, I want people to understand, hon. member, what it is that in fact they're voting on. This would have to be unanimous, and this would not be precedent setting. This would be for this grouping of motions for returns together.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. Believe me, this is in everybody's best interest to expedite this process. Now, I do think it is very important that the *Hansard* reflect the nature of the requests. I would be happy to move the motions having had the opportunity to read the motions into the record.

As I understand it, the government is saying they are going to reject each one of these motions. They are not going to amend them. Many of the arguments that I have to present to the Assembly on these motions would be similar arguments in any case, and I'd be willing to do that, but I would not be willing to give up the opportunity to get them on the record.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I have just been notified, and I was wrong. These kinds of motions are not debatable, so I guess you have made your point. Basically, the motion is before the Assembly, and that's basically to group together a number of motions for returns. I won't read them out again, but we need unanimous consent to do that and deal with them as one motion. That motion is before the Assembly, so I would ask that we vote on this, please.

The hon. Provincial Treasurer has moved that we group together a number of motions for returns and deal with them all together. I will not at this point, because I've done it before, read the numbers into the record. Does the Assembly agree with the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

5:10

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, may I make the motion, then, that we proceed with unanimous consent to vote on the series of motions enumerated once I've had an opportunity to move each one by reading it into the record, and I will do so in sequence.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has moved that the same sequence of numbers be looked at together but he wishes in fact for them to be read in entirety into the *Hansard* transcript.

MR. SAPERS: I'm sorry; I couldn't hear you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Each and every motion for a return in entirety?

MR. SAPERS: Yes. I will read them, move them. I understand it doesn't set a precedent, and I understand that the government is going to reject this particular group of motions.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Okay. Well, this would also have to

have unanimous consent of the Assembly. So is everyone comfortable with the clarification as to this motion?

All those in favour of the motion as moved by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

Hon. member, I would presume that you plan to read these consecutively.

MR. SAPERS: Here we go, Madam Speaker.

The following motions I would move be accepted by the Assembly.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M140. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of memoranda, briefing notes, background documents, correspondence, and letters prepared for or by the former Deputy Provincial Treasurer, finance and revenue, as part of the monthly large loan review as it related to West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 45 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M141. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the September 1994 letter from the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches to the former Provincial Treasurer indicating that he had agreed that Mr. McPherson act almost like a one-member board until the board was in place as cited on page 45 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M144. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the August 3, 1994, and August 22, 1994, letters between the former Provincial Treasurer and Genra Canada Investments Inc. as cited on page 45 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M151. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the February 28, 1994, letter from the former superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches to the former Provincial Treasurer relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on pages 38 and 39 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M152. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of any written comments, notes, memoranda, letters, management letters, correspondence, and postaudit reviews prepared by the Auditor General and sent to the former Provincial Treasurer evaluating Alberta Treasury Branch procedures relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall or the financial arrangements between the Alberta Treasury Branches and West Edmonton Mall for

the period March 1, 1995, to March 26, 1997, as cited on page 56 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M153. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes, memoranda, briefing notes, background documents, correspondence, and letters prepared by the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches to the former Provincial Treasurer and the former Deputy Provincial Treasurer, finance and revenue, between October 31, 1994, and June 12, 1996, regarding the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on pages 46 and 47 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M159. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the July 1987 request by Triple Five Corporation that the province provide a \$485 million cash flow guarantee as cited on page 28 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M160. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the September 26, 1994, Genra Canada Investments Inc. settlement as cited on page 22 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M161. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the January 29, 1988, recommendation from Alberta Treasury that Triple Five Corporation be advised that a government guarantee was not available as cited on page 16 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M162. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the December 22, 1987, report prepared for Alberta Treasury by First Boston Corporation reviewing a proposal for the province to provide a \$350 million guarantee to West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 16 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M164. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes of meetings held between the former Provincial Treasurer, Genra Canada Investments Inc., the Ghermezians, and the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches for the period March 1, 1994, to November 30, 1994, relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 13 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M166. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the June 22, 1994, letter from the ATB, Alberta Treasury Branches, to Genra Canada Investments Inc. in which ATB states that the ATB is no longer bound by the March 10, 1994, agreement as cited on page 21 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M167. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of letters and memoranda between the former deputy Premier and the former Provincial Treasurer for the period October 29, 1993, and November 1, 1994, relating to the West Edmonton Mall refinancing as cited on page 33 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

5:20

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

- M170. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of briefing notes, memoranda, correspondence, and background documents prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1989, to October 29, 1993, relating to the financing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on pages 28 and 29 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

[Motions lost]

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, with your indulgence and perhaps with the indulgence of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, might I suggest that the same approach be used with questions 142, 143, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 157, 158, 163, 165, and 168? I'm seeing the hon. member indicating no. It would require unanimous consent. I won't ask you to put it to the House. I'll ask him to consider it, and maybe we can do that next week.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, you certainly talk fast. We didn't get some of those numbers down.

MR. HANCOCK: I'll provide a list.

Because the hon. member should have time to consider my suggestion, I would move that we call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening, when we return in Committee of Supply.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The Government House Leader has moved that we now call it 5:30 and that when we return at 8 p.m., we will return in Committee of Supply. All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:23 p.m.]