

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, April 21, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/04/21
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

As Canadians and as Albertans we give thanks for the precious gifts of freedom and peace which we enjoy.

As Members of this Legislative Assembly we rededicate ourselves to the valued traditions of parliamentary democracy as a means of serving our province and our country.

Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, today I'm pleased to acknowledge our colleague Shiraz Shariff, who was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the by-election of April 20, 1995.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, over the past several months many outstanding Albertans have been introduced to the hon. members of this Assembly and to the people of Alberta. Many of those attained recognition because of accomplishments in athletics. Today I'd like to introduce a young man who recently was proclaimed a grand prize winner in Corel Corporation's world design contest for web site abstract creativity. Wolfgang Maul was chosen the winner of the abstract category in computer art from an entry field of thousands of designers from throughout the world. He is among other international winners from Germany, Russia, Italy, Bosnia, Greece, and the United States. For his efforts Wolfgang received a trip to Ottawa for the gala presentation and a prize package worth an estimated \$20,000 American.

Born in Edmonton, Wolfgang Maul is one of ours. He is an employee of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, and we are fortunate to have Wolfgang's talent for graphic design as a Legislative Assembly Office resource. You can see his talent on the Legislative Assembly's worldwide web home page, which he maintains.

Wolfgang is seated in the Speaker's gallery, and he is accompanied by his wife, Tamsin Maul; mother, Brigitte Maul; mother-in-law, Sarah Bohnet; and father-in-law, Artur Bohnet. I would ask Wolfgang Maul to rise and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to file today signed by a number of residents of the Peace River area, and in the petition they state:

We the undersigned urge the government of Alberta to hold a province wide plebiscite to determine once and for all the fate of VLTs in Alberta.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to table this afternoon. It's a petition from 95 Albertans urging the Government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Strathmore-Brooks I'd like to present a petition from the Brooks Catholic community.

We, the undersigned, wish to protest the lack of funding for suitable school space in the Christ the Redeemer Catholic School Division. Four hundred and thirty names attached to that.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present an SOS petition on behalf of 110 Edmontonians to

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

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling this afternoon from the United Nurses of Alberta to the assistant deputy minister of Labour wherein they request that mediation needs "to involve all of the affected Locals and Employers currently in bargaining."

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today a set of 13 different amendments to Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act, which returns tonight for debate in Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, today I wish to file with the Assembly copies of a memo sent to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler which supplements my answers to her questions in the House on March 31 concerning the operations of the Cultural Diversity Institute.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to table five copies of the government of Alberta news release dated February 12, 1998, entitled Ensuring a Quality Health System Now and in the Future.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, I'm pleased today to rise on behalf of Mr. Speaker and introduce to this Assembly a group of young people from across Alberta who are in Edmonton this week participating in the Forum for Young Albertans. The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan political learning opportunity for senior high school students. On Friday here in this Chamber the students will participate in a model parliament after having had prior discussions with Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and staff regarding their roles in the Legislature. We are pleased to have these students with us today sitting in both the members' gallery and the public gallery. I would ask them

now to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, on your behalf I'm pleased to rise and introduce to the Assembly very special individuals within the Legislative Assembly Office. They are volunteers who assist visitor services with school groups, educational programs, special events, and grounds tours to summer visitors to this wonderful building. Seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, are Jean Yates, volunteer of seven years; Doreen O'Callaghan, a volunteer of five years; Clive Lomax, a volunteer of four years; Myrna Grimm and Rita Alfrey, volunteers of one year. I'd also like to mention two additional one-year volunteers who were not able to be with us today: Pat Foster and Jeanne Sui. I'd ask all these volunteers now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today for me to introduce through you to the remainder of the Members of the Legislative Assembly two different groups of people that are here today. We have in the public gallery three constituents of mine that have spent a great deal of time in their lives volunteering. This being Volunteer Week I'd like to introduce to you, first of all, Lois and Doug Sorenson and Denise Chapman. If they would be so kind as to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

And the second, sir. Also in the public gallery there is a person that does a lot to keep my life together in my constituency office. I'd like to introduce to you a southern Albertan, one from the Vulcan area originally. She's in the audience. I'd like Rhonda Middlestead to rise and receive the warm welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 82 grade 6 students from l'école Dr. Bernard Brosseau school in Bonnyville. Included in the group is my niece Ashley Levasseur and her mother, Diana Levasseur. They are accompanied by Odessa Lessard, Nicole Jodoin, Therese Richard, Marie-Josée Dupont, Mr. Powers, and Rebecca Hunka and by parents Maurice Richard, Carmen Christensen, Colleen Ostrosky, Grace Oman, Karen Irwin, Agnes Vendiola, Bryan Toth, and Anita VanDerVoort. They are seated in both the members' and the public galleries, and I ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislature.

1:40

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly Mrs. Yvette Kumpula and Mrs. Evelyn Dubetz. They are doing a fine job of running the Edmonton-Glengarry constituency office. As well, Ms Lara Holowenko, who is the executive assistant for the Edmonton-Castle Downs constituency office. They are seated in the public gallery. With your permission I ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. When I had a vacancy in my constituency office, we had a competition publicly

advertised through the *Calgary Herald*; 80 strong candidates, but the strongest is the young woman that started working in Calgary-Buffalo on March 1. I'd invite Patti Spady to stand and receive the customary welcome of members.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a person who keeps me out of trouble in my constituency, my executive assistant, Loreen Kabanuk. She's up in the public gallery. I'd like her to stand up and get the greetings of the Assembly.

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

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you five people who have journeyed here from Brooks to meet with the hon. Minister of Education today: Trena Ramsay, Diane Harty, Lisa Albers, Trudy Crosby, and Barb Wallis. I'd like them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature. I believe they're in the members' gallery.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me real pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and to the members of the Legislature one of the two people who help in my constituency office. I'd ask Susan Giffen to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and provide two introductions to the Members of the Legislative Assembly. The first is six members of the Medicine Hat and district independent day care operators. These women are owners of day cares in the Medicine Hat, Redcliff, and Brooks area. They have come to Edmonton today to meet with MLAs and ministers and the Leader of the Official Opposition around issues of child care. I would also indicate that they're meeting with the minister of science and technology this afternoon as a resident MLA in their constituency. I would ask these women to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I am pleased to introduce to you and through you on behalf of my colleague for Calgary-East 14 grade 5/6 students from St. John Bosco, which is a private Catholic school located in the Forest Heights community. I was pleased to meet with the students earlier today. They are seated in the public gallery and are accompanied by their teacher, Mrs. Philippa Olivier, and home school mom Mrs. Joan Borbely. I would ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce an individual who's important not only to myself but to the constituents of Edmonton-Meadowlark.

She's both my left hand and my right hand. Her name is Pat Cassidy. If she'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second introduction today is also to introduce a woman who runs Edmonton-Riverview in my absence. I would ask Jan Baker to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me tremendous pleasure to introduce to you and to members of this Assembly another time an individual who has distinguished himself as a community volunteer, as a fund-raiser for CKUA, as one of the organizers in the VOTE campaign, and in his spare time he manages to run the Edmonton-Glenora constituency office with distinction. I would ask Mr. Kim Cassidy to please rise and be welcomed by the Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs.

Treaty 8 Centennial

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the honour of joining Premier Ralph Klein, the Minister of Community Development, the Minister of Economic Development, the minister without portfolio responsible for children's services, and 11 of my colleague MLAs at a gala ceremony to launch the commemoration of the Treaty 8 centennial.

One hundred years ago, on June 21, 1899, on the shores of Lesser Slave Lake, Treaty 8 was signed between the British Crown and the First Nations people of that area. This historical treaty covers northern Alberta, parts of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories. Our forefathers and those of the First Nations people of that area entered into Treaty 8 in good faith to build a stronger future for all. As a province we continue to demonstrate our commitment to fulfilling the terms of the treaties by assisting the federal government through our provision of unoccupied Crown land as required.

Since 1986 nine treaty land entitlement claims have been settled in Alberta. Seven of those are within Treaty 8. As Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs I was present last year at the signing of the Alexander settlement, and I look forward with anticipation to the signing of the Loon River First Nation agreement, which was recently approved by our cabinet and will hopefully be signed early this summer. We are making great progress in settling these claims, but we are operating on the basis, Mr. Speaker, that 100 years should be enough to fulfill our obligations.

The Alberta government will continue to pursue the resolution of claims across Alberta. We also announced in this year's throne speech our intention to complete an aboriginal policy framework to guide and strengthen relationships between the government of Alberta and the aboriginal people in this province.

Related to this Treaty 8 celebration, the government of Alberta announced yesterday that it will contribute \$800,000 in lottery revenues to help the Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council on behalf of Treaty 8 stage the Treaty 8 centennial commemoration.

This is in addition, Mr. Speaker, to two CFEP grants that have been provided and moneys that have been provided out of the departments of Community Development and Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs as well as in-kind services provided by our departments to help facilitate this very important celebration. The centennial event is designed to establish and promote greater understanding of the treaties and their significance. A very significant part of the celebration process is the educational component attached to it.

I congratulate the regional council and the Treaty 8 Grand Council and all involved for their creativity, their energy, and their willingness to share their culture in this way. I look forward to being part of the commemoration on June 21. I encourage all Albertans to become involved during the week of festivities between June 17 and 21 and extending through to August in various parts of the Treaty 8 area.

These events will provide an excellent opportunity for Albertans and their families to spend summer vacation time in northern Alberta learning more about aboriginal history, learning more about Alberta in general, and sharing in the spirit of a momentous cultural commemoration.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to congratulate the First Nations people who are celebrating the centennial of Treaty 8. Treaty 8, that was signed in 1899, included all the lands north of the Athabasca River and then east of Cold Lake. Treaty 8 includes the entire area of what was to become northern Alberta and of course stretches into the neighbouring provinces to the east and west and the Northwest Territories. It deals with the rights of 40 bands.

In 1899 the signing of Treaty 8 was an international agreement between one nation and another. The First Nations people still have a primary relationship with the federal government. The federal minister of Indian and northern affairs met last year with Grand Chief Eddie Tallman, representing Treaty 8 First Nations, to discuss self-government, an issue of major concern to all First Nations people and the federal government. However, the provincial government also has an important role to play. The treaty made commitments to First Nations peoples including the rights to fish, hunt, trap, and the provincial government needs to respect these traditional rights.

1:50

It is great to celebrate the centenary of Treaty 8. I hope the celebrations will provide an opportunity for all of those who are in northern Alberta this summer to become more familiar with the richness of the aboriginal culture. This event also reminds us that even after 100 years we still have a number of major issues that need to be addressed, and I hope that after the celebrations are over, we will continue with new resolve to settle the outstanding claims.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Education Funding

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This government is forcing the Edmonton public school board to lay off nearly 200 teachers and another 100 support staff. Yesterday the Premier referred to Edmonton public's effort to eliminate its accumulated deficit by saying:

So the board's budget for next year actually shows a surplus of \$5.4 million, which will be used to start bringing deficits down. This is long-term planning, and we commend the Edmonton public school board for doing that kind of planning, for undertaking that kind of process.

Not a mention of classrooms, of teachers, of families, or of a toll on children and on learning. Unbelievable, but true to form for a government that knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing. My questions are to the Premier are. How much more in user fees will Edmonton families be paying for instruction, supplies, and transportation now that the Premier has shut the door on helping out Edmonton students and their school board deficits?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have hardly shut the door. Again I will remind the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition that this government has reinvested almost \$600 million since 1995. We're looking at this year, next year, and the year following, \$600 million in addition to the \$400 million already invested. Almost a billion dollars. This is hardly closing the door on education. This is an average 6 percent increase per year over six years. That is far and above the rate of inflation, and it should be adequate to satisfy the needs of the various school districts in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier describe his rationale for commending Edmonton public for using a projected \$5.4 million surplus for rapid debt reduction while ignoring the impact those province-satisfying actions will have on our classrooms?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again I have to allude to an article that was in one of the newspapers this morning where the board chairman, George Nicholson, is quoted as saying that he's counting on retirements to reduce most of the positions dictated by its budget.

He said 150 teachers have [already] announced their June retirements and 40 more teaching positions must be cut.

"We expect no individual will lose their job through layoffs."

This sounds like an orderly way to deal with the situation.

Again, I reiterate my commendation of the Edmonton public school board for addressing the deficit in a straightforward, orderly, and responsible way.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, when can Edmonton parents expect relief from overcrowded and split classes, from a shortage of current textbooks and technology as a result of this government's lack of commitment to public education?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take great exception to "lack of commitment." This government has identified education as certainly one of the top priorities right up there with health. Again I have to reiterate that a commitment of nearly one billion additional dollars -- additional, new dollars -- to education is a significant amount. Maybe it's not significant to this spend-like-crazy Liberal Party, but to the average Albertan a billion dollars is a huge amount of money.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to pose the question that I'm sure they won't answer. We have said that a billion dollars over six years is adequate, an average of about 6 percent per year. That is deemed to be adequate, especially in light of what Ms Bauni Mackay said, that she was absolutely euphoric that we were reinvesting that kind of money. She would have been euphoric if we had invested an average of 3 percent per year, but this is an average of 6 percent.

Here's the general question: how much more? Will this hon. member stand up and give us a figure as to how much more she wants us to spend on education, how much more she wants us to

spend on health, how much more she wants to spend on the multitude of programs that are provided by this government? Mr. Speaker, will she stand up and give us the figures so we will know where the Liberals stand, we will know what their bottom line is.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this government's... [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor with her second main question.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this government's callousness and shortsightedness is not limited to the treatment of Edmonton schools. The Calgary board of education is contemplating layoffs of 240 teachers and more than 100 support staff faced with some of the most crowded classrooms and schools in the province. The government's lack of support for children in public schools is an insult to a city whose young educated citizens know the value of an excellent education. To the Premier: why does this government refuse to acknowledge the results of the Calgary board of education review, which affirms the excellent job done with the limited resources available from this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, the Calgary board of education's budget as I understand won't be presented to the board until sometime in May. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that's the case. So we don't know basically what the board is going to do at this particular time.

Again I would remind the hon. member that a billion dollar reinvestment of new dollars in education should go a long way, especially since those involved in the business of education were absolutely elated before the budget or said that they would be elated if they got 3 percent. Well, they're getting 6 percent. What has changed in those few short months?

Again I would ask the Liberal opposition: how much? How much more? What is their dollar figure? They talk about more and more. Is it another billion? Is it another 2 billion? Is it another 3 billion? Is it a zillion or a trillion? What is the figure? How much?

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that this government has promised a review of its allocation of resources for school boards, how many more years will pass before the unique needs and the expenses of our urban school boards will be addressed?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they are being addressed as we speak. Six hundred million dollars starting this year over the next three years. That is a significant amount on top of the almost \$400 million that has already been reinvested. That is a significant amount. A 6 percent increase this year, a 6 percent increase next year, a 6 percent increase the year after that: that is very significant. Six threes are 18; that's an 18 percent increase in funding over three years. That is absolutely huge. That is far beyond the anticipated rate of inflation.

But again I ask the question: how much more? You know, put it on the line. I ask the Liberal Party to do this.

Put it on the line so that the taxpayers know exactly what kind of a party this is and really how they demonstrate to the public that everything can be fixed by spending, spending, and spending more.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that five years ago property

taxes covered 97 percent of the Calgary board of education's cost of educating students and today it covers only 90 percent, how is the Calgary board supposed to make up the shortfall?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, we expect the Calgary board to exercise prudent, proper budgeting like every other school district.

The leader of the Liberal opposition knows very well that we had to take some dramatic steps to bring about equality throughout the education system in this province, a duty that she failed to perform when she was Minister of Education. I would point that out. She liked the system. She liked the system where some school districts with a huge property tax base could spend up to \$12,000 per district, where some of the poorer rural areas could spend absolutely the bare minimum. That's the system that she liked. It was a system that was unfair, it was unequal, but she must have liked that system, Mr. Speaker, because she did nothing to fix it. Nothing at all.

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

User Fees

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the past six years this government has brought in over 800 new and increased user fees including over 400 through regulation, bringing in \$285 million in tax grab on Albertans. The Premier says that keeping user fee changes by regulation are simply adjustments to reflect the cost of providing services. Albertans call it taxation. My questions are to the Premier. How can the Premier claim that user fees are adjusted to the cost of service when not one government department was able to provide detailed cost-of-service data when requested by the Official Opposition?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Provincial Treasurer pointed out yesterday, all of that information will be tabled. There will be a complete and thorough review of all of the 800 or so fees. Again, that information will all be tabled at that time. The Liberal opposition will have an opportunity to provide, I hope, constructive input as to whether those fees are indeed fair.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many user fees are enough?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker . . . Right. Thank you. It's hard to address you, sir, and listen to this yipping and yapping over there. It really is.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how can the Premier claim that user fee taxes are going down when his budget clearly shows they are going up by nearly \$92 million over the next three years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there will be legislation introduced, as I understand it, Bill 35, to basically freeze all of the user fees until we have had an opportunity to review those fees. I can assure you that none of these will go up, but in many cases they will likely go down.

I would reiterate what the hon. Provincial Treasurer said relative to taxes in this province: the only way that they are going is down. I would apply that to most of the user fees. All we want to do is to make sure that these fees are commensurate with the value of the service being provided, Mr. Speaker.

I'll have the hon. Provincial Treasurer supplement.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, that's quite accurate. You know, I find that

the response has been interesting the last couple of days. We have indicated that we're going to do a review of all of our fees. As a matter of fact we are going to table in the Legislature, as the Premier said, a list showing all the fees. We're going to have a committee that will even go beyond that mandate and take other charges that may not be called fees and look at everything that we charge. This is something that I've distinctly heard the Liberals ask be done. There is no other government in this country that is going to be doing such a comprehensive review.

In terms of increase, since 1994 there has been an increase that can be approximated of about 1.3 percent. One point three percent. Our population increase last year alone was something like 2.7 percent. Population and growth are beyond even what fees have increased since 1994.

They've been asking for this exercise. We're asking for their participation in it, and now they seem to be angry that we're doing it. It's a good news exercise. By the time it's done, there will be a number of fees that will be reduced, Mr. Speaker.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary is to the Provincial Treasurer. Included in this list will you be identifying those fees which are in violation of the Supreme Court ruling in the Eurig estates case?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, that's a very good point that is being made here. It happens rarely from the Liberals, but this is a good point that's being made. The Eurig case, which went to the Supreme Court, basically said that Legislatures or governments can charge whatever they want for any fee, but if what they are charging is significantly beyond cost recovery, then that fee needs to be put in statute. It needs to be brought into the Legislature rather than simply in regulation. Part of the exercise clearly is to determine that. If we have fees that go far beyond cost recovery -- I don't know if we do, but if we do, then we'll have to make a decision with input from the Liberals on whether we should maintain that fee in regulation and drop the cost or in fact bring it into the Legislature. That'll be part of the discussion that we want to invite them to take part in.

Education Funding

(continued)

MS BARRETT: The Calgary board of education is now facing a \$55 million accumulated deficit by the end of the school year thereby making it impossible to reach a fair settlement with its teachers. The Edmonton public school board is attempting to deal with its \$21 million accumulated deficit through -- what a surprise -- bigger class sizes and laying off 189 full-time teachers. My question is to the Premier, and it's this: why was this government willing to make a onetime payment to eliminate the accumulated deficits of its appointed regional health authorities? Remember the document I filed earlier today? That was the news release from 1998. They were willing to make the onetime payment to the unelected regional health authorities, but the government refuses to even consider a onetime payment to help eliminate the deficit of the democratically elected school boards in Edmonton and Calgary.

MRS. McCLELLAN: That's a good point.

MS BARRETT: It is.

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I indicated previously in this Legislature, we're willing to work with any board that is experiencing problems with financing and particularly with deficit financing

to see if we can achieve some administrative efficiencies and help them through some of these problems.

Indeed before we addressed the health situation, we did detailed examinations of those hospital authorities and worked with the hospital authorities to bring about assurances that they would deal with their deficits and develop programs to deal with deficits. They're doing a darned good job of that, and I would hope that the school boards would do the same.

MS BARRETT: I don't understand. Why would the Premier, why would the government, then, not make the same agreement with the elected school boards as it did with the appointed RHAs and get into meetings with them and offer the money to eliminate the deficits that they inherited?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think that the hon. leader of the NDs doesn't understand that we are indeed helping the school boards. Again, I would have to reiterate that \$600 million over the next three years, an average 6 percent increase each year starting this year and the two years following, should go a long way to helping these school boards to deal with any deficit financing they might have. That is a huge chunk of change added to the almost \$400 million that has already been reinvested. That is help. I mean, there are not many departments in this government that have been guaranteed -- guaranteed -- a 6 percent increase over three years. That is very significant. Eighteen percent. That should go a long way to help any school board with a deficit problem to deal with those problems. I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

2:10

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, one thing that I wish to supplement in terms of the Premier's answer is with reference to the hon. ND leader's assertion that the Calgary board is not in a position to make a fair offer to its teachers. We believe that teachers work hard and that they do deserve a fair pay increase. What's been offered by the school board is a 10 percent offer over a three-year period, a significantly generous offer in my view, and a guarantee that classroom sizes will be limited so that there will be a 26 student per class limit in elementary school classrooms, 28 at the junior high level, and 30 at the high school level. So the initial assertion that the board has not been in a position to place a fair offer on the table I don't think is correct.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, instead of the Premier asking the opposition how much is enough -- I can give him the answer. In Calgary's case it would be \$55 million; that would be enough to get rid of their deficit. Why doesn't the Premier meet with the two boards of education that are facing these crippling accumulated deficits so that he gets a firsthand appreciation of why they need the government to cover those deficits?

MR. KLEIN: As a matter of fact we're going to do precisely that. I think I have a meeting with the two board chairmen -- when is it? -- sometime this month or next month.

AN HON. MEMBER: This month.

MR. KLEIN: Right. Yes. And we're going to discuss some of these issues.

Again I will have to reiterate that when people say, "Why don't you give more money to the school boards?" well, we are. We have given a significant amount this year, \$200 million, next year \$200 million on average, the year after that another \$200 million, an

average of 6 percent. They will get over the next two years a 12 percent increase in addition to what they received this year, in addition to the almost \$400 million that they've received since 1995.

So when the media say, "Will you give them any more money?" well, we are going to give them more money. There is a three-year commitment to give them 18 percent, starting with 6 percent this year, 6 percent next year, and 6 percent the following year. That is more money. That is significant dollars. Even to the CBC it's significant dollars, or to the Liberal Party it's significant dollars. Those are new extra dollars.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Student Debt

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development. Young Albertans who are attending our colleges and universities are graduating with certificates, diplomas, degrees, and huge crippling debts. To the minister: if the minister believes that education is the key to a better life, why are his department and the government forcing students to incur such huge debts?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, let's place things in context first of all. Less than half of the students in our postsecondary system require student loans, and of those that actually have student loans with us, we have the second lowest, I guess it is, average debt load in the country.

I would want to remind some of my friends opposite that had such a good time when the question was being asked . . . [interjections] I know. I understand. I'm just talking about the reaction. They could be a real help. You in the opposition in Alberta could be a real help to students here in the province by talking to your federal cousins, because the overwhelming amount of debt that students are experiencing is the federal student loan program. We have been working very diligently with these folks, and we think we can work with the federal government and here in the province to reduce student debt.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development: how can the minister ignore the fact that many needy Albertans are frightened away by the high costs of postsecondary education and not eliminate the economic barrier to students to better themselves through postsecondary education?

MR. DUNFORD: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I was unable to hear the question.

THE SPEAKER: That's probably correct because of all the chatter that was going on in all parts of the House. Last question, hon. member.

MR. TANNAS: Again to the minister, the final supplemental: given that there are some loans and grants available, is it government policy to pass on the cost of education to the shoulders of students so that they graduate with this millstone of huge debt?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think this is an excellent point and a good opportunity for me to once again inform Albertans, people here in the House, and especially the youth of the forum that are here in the galleries that the policy of this government is and will continue to be that those who can afford to pay will pay and that those that cannot

afford to pay to enter our postsecondary system will find assistance with this government. We think the assistance programs we've put in place, Mr. Speaker, strike a nice balance between those two objectives.

There is no reason for any adult in Alberta who is qualified and motivated to enter our postsecondary system not to be able to do so. Yes, they may have to take on student debt, but the debt they would take on in entering the postsecondary system is the best investment they will ever, ever make in their lives. It will do three things at least. Higher education will lead to a higher job, it'll lead to more money, and I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that it'll lead to better health.

Brooks Day Care Study

MRS. SLOAN: Lakeside Packers in the town of Brooks recently received a \$50,000 grant by the Minister of Family and Social Services and MLA for Brooks to study child care. The town didn't ask for it. The child authority knew nothing about it. The only qualified day care provider is excluded from participating. My questions today are to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Why, Mr. Minister, was this grant awarded when all other day care operators in the province must spend their own money to complete feasibility studies?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all I would like to correct the hon. member as once again she's got her facts wrong. There was no grant given to Lakeside Packers. There was a \$50,000 grant that was given to FCSS in Brooks, and the reason and the rationale behind that grant was to look at studying an after-hours day care program.

In Brooks, Alberta, they are undergoing a tremendous amount of growth. Part of that growth occurs in an industry where workers do not necessarily work from 8 to 5. We have as many people working from 8 to 5 as we do from 5 to midnight or 5 till 1 in the morning. What this \$50,000 is intended for is to look at the feasibility of running after-hours day care in the province. We do not at present fund any after-hours day care in the province. When there are communities such as Brooks that are very dependent upon shift workers, maybe the opposition wants the children to be left in the home at nighttime, but we don't, so we're looking at the feasibility of setting up an after-hours day care.

MRS. SLOAN: Given that the government's press release on this matter did not appear on the government web site, why was this announcement not made provincewide?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I have here a copy of the news release. It's the same as any other news release that we've ever put out in our department. March 29, 1999: "A \$50,000 grant from Alberta Family and Social Services will be used to study the feasibility of establishing an extended hours child care program in Brooks." Here it is. I don't know what she's talking about.

2:20

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, is this not a political gift to a large business to set up a day care?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member must not be hearing me properly. Lakeside Packers did not receive the grant. FCSS in Brooks received the grant.

If I may, I'll just comment on some of what the mayor of Brooks said. I think it is wonderful; I think it will help Brooks, said Lisa Nickel, who's the owner of a day home. Mayor Don Weisbeck says that there is a perceived demand for child care services and that the

study will help establish how large the demand is; I think right now we have to look at the numbers, the affordability, and who it will cater to. Lakeside community liaison, Tracey Dueck, says: the study is the result of a community-driven effort, we were quite concerned about the day care situation in Brooks, we're really excited that this announcement came, and it is quite a relief that there is money for the study.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know what she's talking about.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Agricultural Trade with the U.S.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because of interventions by North Dakota's governor trade restriction legislation that was supposed to happen in that state that would have been harmful to Alberta has been dropped. This is very, very good news for our farming communities in this province. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. How can we promote a better relationship with our neighbours to the south so that we can improve co-operation and do away with conflicts in the agricultural sector?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the news coming out of North Dakota has certainly been excellent. Common sense has prevailed, and the governor has interceded in what would have been a very detrimental order that was passed in their Legislature.

However, in order to facilitate better communication and trade between Alberta and the Pacific Northwest states, the Premier and I visited Governor Racicot in Montana in December. The Premier had introduced a very informal dispute resolution process to try and resolve some of these trade border disputes before they escalate to international settings. As a result, the Premier will be hosting a conference together with Governor Racicot in Great Falls, Montana, June 1 and 2 to try and deal with these issues.

MR. LANGEVIN: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: what is the purpose of this conference, and what will be the immediate benefit to our farm communities?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, currently our beef trade with the States is about \$2.8 billion. We see on the horizon much legislation that's being introduced in the states of Colorado and Idaho referring to beef labeling. We've got to start somewhere to try and bring about a better dialogue and talk about opportunities for agriculture on both sides of the border. This particular conference will take industry leaders from both sides of the border, put them at the same table, and start dealing with a lot of these issues, many of them, quite frankly, as a result of poor communication and wrong information. It's polarized producers on both sides of the border, forcing really poor decisions.

MR. LANGEVIN: Again to the same minister: how can you guarantee that the agriculture sector will be represented properly at that conference?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we on the Alberta side have invited about 150 different participants. It includes the oilseeds, cereals, and livestock sectors, but most importantly also all of our food processors to ensure that everyone that's involved in agriculture and food is represented at this conference. We expect that we'll have an excellent turnout, and this will provide an opportunity for the

Premier and the governor to open up the conference to talk about their vision for agriculture and food and then leave it up to the people that are actually investing the money in this industry to dialogue and bring about some change.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, followed by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Day Care

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Day care operators in this province are closing their doors because they cannot afford to provide quality care. Since the province removed the operating allowance, middle-income parents in Alberta cannot afford to send their children to quality care, thus we have a two-tier system. This afternoon independent day care operators traveled from southern Alberta to meet with the Minister of Family and Social Services, to meet with the minister of children's services and were refused. My question is to the minister responsible for children's services. In light of her answer on April 15, 1999, in this House where she talked about the importance of involving the whole community, would she be good enough to explain why she refused to meet with the independent day care operators group from Medicine Hat? Why was that, Madam Minister?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I think it's really important to be able to indicate that sometimes our schedules and our calendars conflict with other things that have been booked. Sometimes we're doubled booked, so we have to say no to some of the meetings that have been requested of us.

DR. OBERG: The hon. member has a couple of inaccuracies in what he said. First of all, I have never received an invitation from the Medicine Hat day care association to meet with them. I knew they were coming today, and I went through my invitations and asked my staff: did they send an invitation to meet with me? Mr. Speaker, they did not. The hon. member opposite sent me an invitation to ask me to meet with them, but I received nothing from the Medicine Hat day care association.

Mr. Speaker, I must say that the hon. member who just asked the question was talking about the two levels of day care and the changes to day care. With the elimination of the operating allowance we are actually putting \$3 million more into day care than we did last year. We're now spending \$64 million on day care as opposed to \$61 million last year.

Mr. Speaker, I've stood up in this Assembly many times and talked about the child care subsidy, how we've increased the rate. Presently if there are two children from a two-parent family, you will receive a subsidy up to \$43,000 net income per year.

The last thing I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that presently in Medicine Hat there is a 35 percent vacancy rate in day care spaces.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question, going back to the minister responsible for children's services: will that minister explain the inequity created when day home operators in Alberta receive an administrative fee while day cares do not?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, that's a great question, and I know the Minister of Family and Social Services, whose responsibility it is in terms of service delivery, will be answering. I think it's important to identify who's responsible for what.

First of all, as minister responsible for children's services I have two mandates. One is to be able to move it into the community-

based system where the regional authorities would take over service delivery, and at that point the Minister of Family and Social Services takes over. My second mandate is to be able to look at integration both at the bureaucracy level as well as at the community level. That's exactly where my responsibilities lie. Service delivery I will hand over to the Minister of Family and Social Services.

DR. OBERG: Very short, Mr. Speaker. I will just comment by talking about the child care subsidy rates. For day care for a child from zero to 18 months they receive \$475. For a child 19 months and older it's \$380 in day care. In a family day home it's \$300.

MR. DICKSON: My final question, Mr. Speaker: while we're waiting for the Premier to rename ministries so they more accurately reflect responsibilities, will this minister responsible for children's services commit to implementing a wage enhancement program similar to what we've seen in other provinces as part of the children's initiative?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, obviously it's really important to be able to identify what the Alberta children's initiative is. The Alberta children's initiative is to be able to look at integration within the various departments that have been involved in the service delivery aspect of children's services. It is at the point where it is now a framework to work with the various ministries so that we can make it much better for communities and families to be able to access services.

2:30

Mr. Speaker, in terms of what is happening on service delivery, the Minister of Family and Social Services is responsible for that, and I will allow him to be able to do that in terms of explaining what he's been doing, because I think he's done a marvelous job at making service delivery better.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll keep it very short. The hon. member raises an issue of great concern. Wages for day care workers are very low. One of the things that we have been looking at in our department is how to enhance those wages so that the private operators do not take the money that we have given them and put it in their jeans but instead pass it on to their workers. Unfortunately we do not have a lot of control monetarily as we direct the money that we give to day cares through the parents. We are working with the day care operators to find the best possible way to enhance those wages so that the money that is given to them goes directly to the worker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Auto Glass Tinting

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been brought to my attention by a constituent that our current laws governing tinted auto glass state that only factory tinted glass is legal and that no exemptions exist, not even for medical conditions such as severe photosensitivity, even though some factory tint is much darker than what is available through after-market suppliers. It would seem more appropriate to base regulation or legislation on the degree of tint rather than its point of origin or who sells it. My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Could the minister explain why such a discrepancy exists?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The safety glass of new motor vehicles or

replacement glazing sold in Alberta is required by our current legislation to meet the standards of the Canadian Motor Vehicle Safety Act as well as other standards that are set. These standards require that glazing material allow 70 percent of the light to show through. Our current Highway Safety Act prohibits the installation of any material on the windshield or on the side windows that indeed will restrict it to less than that.

The application of film or any other type of device that will reduce the amount of light that is allowed through the windows is also not only light restrictive, but it creates a problem if involved in an accident or a collision. The shattering characteristics are changed, and therefore there is a higher risk as far as shattering is concerned and injury to the people that are involved in the vehicle.

As far as those that may have a photosensitivity with their skin, there is a process where by applying to the Motor Transport Board, exemptions can be allowed and will be provided for those that have a medical certificate indicating that indeed they require tinted glass.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental to the same minister: would he commit to reviewing the current regulations regarding this issue as it appears to favour one supplier of the service over another?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The current legislation that we're bringing forward is going to create the climate for a review of all issues, including this particular issue. So indeed once the Traffic Safety Act is passed, regulation will allow us to make ongoing changes where they are required. It will allow for the review of all the regulations that are required to develop the Traffic Safety Act.

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

Safety Code Enforcement

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1996 faulty welding and failure to properly supervise and inspect furnace repairs at the Swan Hills waste treatment plant caused the release of PCBs, dioxins, and furans. The environmental damage is irreversible, and the contaminants will be cleaned up at taxpayers' expense. This is another example of industrial self-regulation under the Safety Codes Act. My first question is to the Minister of Labour. Why was there no inspection prior to the furnace being returned to active service which would have uncovered that there was no insulation placed over the steel plate to protect it from extreme temperatures?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, clearly it's a technical question, and we're more than pleased to take it under advisement and report back to the member.

MR. MacDONALD: The minister doesn't know.

Perhaps he can answer this question for me, Mr. Speaker. What testing procedures were used to certify the stainless steel welders for this job?

MR. SMITH: Very clearly, Mr. Speaker, the policy is a matter of record, and he's more than welcome to do his own digging.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, considering that this release happened in 1996, why, after this total failure of the safety code system, has the minister in the interest of public safety and financial accountability not conducted a thorough review of this incident to

ensure that it does not happen again? Why aren't you doing your job?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, you know, we'll report back to the House in the fullness of time. We will undertake an examination of the member's original points and report back.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Education Funding

(continued)

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Premier has pointed out in this House, by September 2001 total education spending will be almost a billion dollars higher than it was in '95-96. My question is to the Minister of Education. Why, then, are some school boards still talking about cuts to staff, resources, and programs?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, staff costs are the largest single expense that school boards face, including the Calgary board of education. The Calgary board of education review, which has been used for a number of very good purposes by both the board and the province alike, found that instructional staff take up about 83 percent of the budget for the Calgary public schools.

Mr. Speaker, we have reinvested and have made new investment in education: 2 percent last year, 3 percent for the coming year, 2 percent in the year after that, and another 2 percent in the year after that, plus, in addition to that basic instructional grant rate increase, millions of dollars in targeted funds for things like special-needs students and new initiatives such as the early literacy program to help students learn better.

One point that I'd like to make is this: when teacher unions and their school boards agree to salary increases that are higher than the levels of funding, Mr. Speaker, then boards will have to find the money from other parts of their budget or in the alternative they ultimately incur deficits that mortgage their future decision-making.

The people of this province, Mr. Speaker, will clearly remember that when this government was elected in 1993, they elected this government to eliminate years of accumulated deficits. We had to make tough decisions to get back in the black. When school boards run deficits of a similar nature, they at some point will face those same kinds of decisions. The issues of taking responsibility for those deficits and dealing with them with sometimes tough measures is the responsibility of school boards.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: can he explain how a small pupil/teacher ratio and a cap on instructional hours can lead to bigger classes?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting point of debate in the city of Calgary. There is in the minds of some people an equation of pupil/teacher ratios to class size. Pupil/teacher ratios clearly do not reflect class size. PTRs include teachers in support positions such as administration in central office, librarians, and counselors, and accordingly a jurisdiction may have a pupil/teacher ratio of fewer than 20 students per teacher but ultimately the class size may be larger than 20 students in a classroom.

Mr. Speaker, we are expecting that the numbers of students in this province will go up. Accordingly we are allocating \$194 million to reflect increases in enrollment that we expect. Most of that will go to teachers' salaries. Boards will have to make decisions on how to maximize their staff resources in the classroom.

2:40

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question which was raised about instructional hours and their limits, just by way of information, for the average elementary school student in the public system in Calgary their contract requires a limit on the number of instructional hours, and averaged over the year for the Calgary public elementary teacher, that may not exceed 30 hours of scheduled duties per week and 23 hours of instructional time per week. The seven hours' difference may be for things like parent/teacher interviews and such. What that limit means is that one teacher in the classroom is not working enough hours to deliver the hours of instruction they're guaranteed under the School Act.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: if staffing creates such a restriction on school board decision-making, then why not just increase funding for schools?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have increased funding for schools, and we're continuing to increase funding for schools. The increase in the instructional funding is only part of the picture: \$22 million for the early literacy initiative, \$10 million for teacher assistants, \$26 million a year for student health initiatives. As I indicated, in the noninstructional spending for areas like operations, maintenance, and transportation, those areas are going up by 3 percent, 2 percent, and 2 percent.

Mr. Speaker, people are often saying that the government should put more money in this, but I wish to leave people with this impression: it is not the government's money; every dollar comes from the taxpayer. In order to provide more funding, we would either have to raise education property taxes or raise income taxes or other taxes. Albertans do not want more taxes.

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds from now, hon. members, I will call on the first of seven hon. members who will participate in Recognitions today. Pending that, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: Introduction of Guests
(*reversion*)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, again I'm pleased to rise today on behalf of Mr. Speaker and introduce to the Assembly a group of young people from across Alberta who are in Edmonton this week to participate in the Forum for Young Albertans. The Forum for Young Albertans is a nonpartisan, political learning opportunity for senior high school students. On Friday here in this Chamber the students will participate in a model parliament after having had prior discussions with Mr. Speaker, Members of the Legislative Assembly, and the staff regarding their roles in the Legislature.

We are pleased to have the students with us today sitting in the galleries, and I would ask them now to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce a woman who is serving as the constituency secretary in the constituency of Edmonton-McClung. Ruby Swanson comes

with a wealth of experience including being a producer for CBC Radio in her days past, an excellent administrator and a wonderful manager of the office. I would ask her to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Recognitions

Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Public recognition of youth volunteerism is more than saying thank you for a job well done. It focuses community attention on the contributions that young people make. When we publicly recognize contributions made by young volunteers, we affirm the value of their actions in the community.

A recent event celebrating special recognitions of young volunteers in Wetaskiwin at the Reynolds-Alberta Museum on the evening of April 19, 1999, was the leaders of tomorrow awards ceremony. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate all 36 nominees and especially the four award recipients for their outstanding contributions to their community. The award winners in the four categories include Trista Wideman, William Rosebluff, Neil Parmar, and Blaine Stone.

The Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency greatly values and appreciates the many acts of service by these dedicated young volunteers to their communities.

Thank you.

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

Doug and Lois Sorenson

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is national Volunteer Week in Canada. This week is to celebrate the contributions of thousands of hours by dedicated Canadians to their fellowman. I can think of no better way to celebrate than to recognize two individuals in our community as fine examples of some 17 million volunteers in Canada. Doug and Lois Sorenson moved to Wellington Park in 1966, where they raised three children. Both coached soccer and basketball in the Athlone community league. They became volunteers from that day, dedicated to their community. Doug worked with scouts, cubs, and rovers, while Lois worked with CGIT. Upon retirement Doug became the president of the Edmonton Neighbourhood Patrol Society, where citizens wearing vests and carrying cell phones keep their neighbourhoods safe. When the Calder community police station opened, Lois and Doug were the very first to volunteer and have remained volunteers ever since.

Thank you.

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

Secretaries Week

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my honour to acknowledge the remarkable work of secretaries throughout the province in both the public-service sector and in private industry. Because we are seated in this Legislature, I wish to pay tribute especially to all the secretaries in this very building and its annexed offices. In our legislative offices, our constituency offices, and the government's departmental offices our secretaries work diligently and wisely to facilitate the productivity of our work, the performance of our jobs, and the effectiveness of our services. I would urge all members of this Assembly to join me in expressing our appreciation to all our secretaries.

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

Jennifer Hartt

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to recognize and congratulate a constituent of Edmonton-Meadowlark, Jennifer Hartt, who was selected for the second year in a row as a member of the 1999 cadet honour band of prairie region. She is one of 100 cadets chosen from the 210 sea, army, and air cadets units across the province. Jennifer, who plays the clarinet, is a member of 699 Jasper Place Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron. The commanding officer of this unit is Captain Bowman, and the sponsor is branch No. 255 Jasper Place Legion.

Jennifer takes music at school and enjoys bike riding when not involved in cadet activities. The cadet honour band of prairie region presented concerts in Calgary, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Thunder Bay and is in its sixth annual concert tour of the prairies. These cadets performed music of almost every style and also demonstrated all that is military pageantry and ceremony. All the bands incorporated military marching, and the pipe band performed with highland dancers.

I'm sure that other members of the cadets look up to Jennifer as a role model and find inspiration from her, and I would also like to recognize the Canadian cadet organizations and their local community sponsors.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with a great deal of pride that I recognize Mr. Speaker's Alberta Youth Parliament. Eighty-three grade 10 students from all across Alberta honoured this Assembly to experience life as an MLA and learn about the parliamentary process by being an MLA. The experience gained through this program for these students and the 14 participating teachers is without a doubt an experience that will benefit not only them but their families, schools, communities, and indeed all of us.

In particular, I would like to recognize and thank members of the Alberta-Northwest Territories command of the Royal Canadian Legion for their support not only of a monetary nature but the personal support provided. Legionnaires hosted a fabulous dinner for the students, and they chaperoned and even became personally involved in the program. The command president, Tom Barton, served as Rupertland's Lieutenant Governor. Legion members should all feel very proud of their efforts. Through their leadership this program was a huge success and one that I am very, very proud to say that we as members of this Assembly played a small role in.

I wish to commend and thank for their efforts the four teachers on the teachers' advisory committee who assisted with the planning and the program guidelines for this event along with the Legislative Assembly staff. Mr. Speaker, thanks to you and your initiative and your willingness to reach out to students throughout this province, this program will help ensure that parliamentary democracy is alive and well in Alberta for many years to come.

2:50

Jim Shewchuk Award

MS BARRETT: I'm pleased to congratulate and honour Mr. Barrie Regan, this year's recipient of the Jim Shewchuk award. This award is sponsored by the United Way of the Alberta Capital Region and the Edmonton & District Labour Council and is given in memory of Jim Shewchuk, honouring his dedication to working people and his

tireless commitment to the labour movement, community, and city.

Barrie has served his union and membership as a committee member, job steward, and has held executive titles as well. He is an enthusiastic community volunteer as well with over 20 years of dedication to the Scout movement. He has also spent countless hours working to raise funds for the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation. Barrie Regan has shown outstanding commitment to bettering the lives of others through his exceptional work in his union, community, and the labour movement. Barrie is a most worthy recipient of the Jim Shewchuk award, and I salute him.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Radway Lions Club 50th Anniversary

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday, April 17, 1999, I had the distinct honour and pleasure to be part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Radway Lions Club. Over the past half century the Radway Lions have built up an enviable record of community service. They have served their community by helping individuals. They paid the hospital bills for an injured hockey player, helped a family whose home was burned, provided bursaries to students, and took care of an old pensioner. They have made sizable donations over the years to numerous Lions' projects. The Lions have been partners with citizens in making this a better place in which to live.

If I may, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of this Assembly I wish to extend a hearty congratulations to you, the Radway Lions. The Lions of Alberta and internationally are true humanitarians. For this I thank you.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 197, 198, 199, and 204.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

[Motion carried]

Big Valley and Ryley Landfills

Q197. Ms Carlson moved that the following question be accepted. On what dates between January 1, 1997, and December 31, 1998, did Alberta Environmental Protection conduct unannounced inspections of the Big Valley industrial landfill and the Ryley hazardous waste landfill, on each occasion how many samples were taken of waste that had already been buried in the landfill and how many of waste being dumped, and what substances, if any, were detected in excess of permissible limits, and what action was taken?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We find it necessary to amend this question before we can accept it. The fact is that we make no distinction between announced and unannounced inspections, so we find it necessary to clarify that, also the fact that we do

not take samples within a landfill to ensure the integrity is not breached.

So, Madam Speaker, the amendments would be: by adding "and announced" after "unannounced" and by striking out

on each occasion how many samples were taken of waste that had already been buried in the landfill and how many of waste being dumped, and what substances, if any, were detected in excess of permissible limits, and what action was taken?

and substituting

for each inspection what field activity occurred and what follow-up action occurred for any noted Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act contravention?

So the question will now read:

On what dates between January 1, 1997, and December 31, 1998, did Alberta Environmental Protection conduct unannounced and announced inspections of the Big Valley industrial landfill and the Ryley hazardous waste landfill, for each inspection what field activity occurred, and what follow-up action occurred for any noted Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act contravention?

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

MS CARLSON: Yes, Madam Speaker. We will accept the amendment. Happy to. However, I have to say that I am a little surprised about the information the minister has just given us in terms of their not differentiating in their own records between announced and unannounced visits. I would think that that would give you some valuable information in terms of the condition of the sites, when you show up unannounced versus when you show up announced. So I would request that the minister, when he sends over this information, also respond to that and let us know if in the future he has any plans to make that simple effort to just record the visits themselves as being announced or unannounced.

Also, I'm quite surprised that when they do these site inspections of these landfills, they're not taking samples. I'm wondering, then, how they get the information in the inspections from the field activity that's occurred in terms of knowing what's going on in the landfill site and how they're detecting excesses that may be occurring at that time. So if the minister could also in his answer give us some background on that, specifically, why they're not taking samples and how they feel that they're adequately getting the information that they require in that regard without it, I would appreciate it.

Yes, Madam Speaker, we will accept the amendment.

[Motion as amended carried]

Parks and Recreation Areas

Q198. Ms Carlson moved that the following question be accepted. Between January 1, 1997, and February 16, 1999, at which provincial parks and recreation areas was a contract for the private-sector management of a campground terminated, at which sites has a new contract been signed with another private-sector operator, which sites are now being managed by the government, and which sites have closed?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SAPERS: Madam.

MR. LUND: Oh, Madam Speaker; I'm sorry.

MR. SAPERS: You should resign.

MR. LUND: I know *Hansard* will correct it.

MR. SAPERS: Not now they won't.

MR. LUND: Madam Speaker, we find it necessary once again to amend this question so that we can accept it. We need to make some word changes regarding the nature of contract termination and the sites to be considered during the specified time period. So we need to add "prior to the expiry date" after "campground terminated," and we need to strike out "at which sites has" and substitute "at which of these sites has"; strike out "which sites are now" and substitute "which of these sites are now"; and strike out "and which sites have been closed" and substitute "and which of these sites have closed."

So the question will now read:

Between January 1, 1997, and February 16, 1999, at which provincial parks and recreation areas was a contract for the private-sector management of a campground terminated prior to the expiry date, at which of these sites has a new contract been signed with another private-sector operator, which of these sites are now being managed by the government, and which of these sites have closed?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Ellerslie on the amendment.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Once again, in the spirit of co-operation we will accept this amendment, but I'm wondering why "prior to the expiry date" -- why the change from our request of just management agreements being terminated? Could the minister in his answer then tell us if there were any that were terminated on the expiry date in addition to those prior to? With that we're happy to support the amendment.

[Motion on amendment carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Ellerslie, do you wish to conclude debate on the main question?

MS CARLSON: No. That's fine.

[Motion as amended carried]

Vandalism/Terrorism in Energy Industry

Q199. Ms Carlson moved that the following question be accepted. What is the name and legal description of each energy industry site at which vandalism or terrorist activity was recorded between January 1, 1997, and February 16, 1999, what is the name of the company owning or leasing the site, what damage was recorded, and at which locations has a charge been laid?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, we have to reject this question on behalf of the government. The way the question is worded, it's just posed far too broadly to be answered with any degree of certainty. No singular RCMP detachment or police detachment across the province is responsible for the numerous acts of vandalism directed at the energy industry. To acquire the information would be labour intensive, time intensive, and a very expensive process. Acts of vandalism can range from denting a building to spraying paint on a building. The way the

question is phrased, it's just too broad for us to be able with any definitiveness to provide an answer.

3:00

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I'm curious as to the reason given by the government for rejecting this written question. I've seen media reports where numbers have been bandied about: this many hundred or that many hundred incidents of vandalism. Obviously somebody has a record. Knowing the government's commitment, the special attention the Minister of Justice had paid to the whole issue of energy-sector vandalism, the task force, the high-profile nature of this whole set of events, I would have thought for certain there would have been an accounting and that certainly the government would have made it their business to determine the true extent of the vandalism that's out there in the oil patch. After all, the government committed some extra resources to this issue. I know that the Minister of Energy has commented on it. The Minister of Justice has commented on it. The Premier has commented on it.

The fact that not one police detachment or one RCMP detachment is responsible for all of the investigations I think is irrelevant. Numbers have been published. Certainly there'd be an expectation that the government would be able to verify those numbers. I'm just very surprised with the rejection.

MS CARLSON: Madam Speaker, I too am surprised at the rejection. What we asked here is that we get information on vandalism or terrorist activity: "the name of the company owning or leasing the site, what damage was recorded, and at which locations has a charge been laid?"

I think this is more than an RCMP matter. When we hear repeatedly from this government how important the energy sector is to economic development in this province, we think they should be doing everything within their power to know and understand what's going on out there in the community and how individuals living in the community and those companies are being affected by occurrences of vandalism or terrorism that may be happening throughout the province. Quite frankly, I think they've been negligent in their duties if the various ministries, who are so fast to co-operate and co-ordinate other activities in the energy sector, are not doing so in this case.

If the Government House Leader says that the question is too broad in its scope, we would respectfully request the government to let us know what would be a better focused question so that we can get some information to clarify this so that we can meet the needs of the community who has requested this information. If we could at some point in time get some further clarification on this so we can continue to pursue the matter, that would satisfy us. We wish they would accept some form of this or had amended it in this particular instance.

[Motion lost]

Environmental Laws Enforcement

Q204. Ms Carlson moved that the following question be accepted. How many staff were employed by Alberta Environmental Protection on January 1, 1999, for the pollution control division, how many announced and how many unannounced inspections did they make in the calendar year 1998, what infringements were detected, and what was the outcome in each case?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I see where it's necessary for us to once again amend this particular question. We need to add "to conduct compliance assurance activities" after "How many staff were employed"; strike out "for the pollution control division"; strike out "announced and how many unannounced"; add "and investigations" after "inspections"; strike out "make" and substitute "conduct pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act"; and strike out "what infringements were detected, and what was the outcome in each case" and substitute "and how many enforcement actions were undertaken by the environmental service under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act in the calendar year 1998?"

One of the big reasons for these amendments, Madam Speaker, is the fact that we have done away with the pollution control division and have moved this out to the six regions, so that causes some problem with trying to answer the question.

The question will now read:

How many staff were employed to conduct compliance assurance activities by Alberta Environmental Protection on January 1, 1999, how many inspections and investigations did they conduct pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act in the calendar year 1998, and how many enforcement actions were undertaken by the environmental service under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act in the calendar year 1998?

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

MS CARLSON: Madam Speaker, we started out pretty good with the first two written questions and have rapidly deteriorated from there. With the amendments that the minister is proposing, he has effectively neutered this question, and we're not getting any valuable information out of it at all now.

We need to know announced and unannounced inspections for the pollution control division. It's in fact in part because they have moved this division out to the regions that we require this information at this time. We need to find out if they have found infringements in the past, particularly those that they didn't take any action on. Specifically, we were looking for information on where there was action taken that was punitive in nature or just saying to them: don't do it; next time there'll be some more punitive kind of action taken. That's the level of detail we want.

We think the people in this province deserve to get that information. There is absolutely no reason why the government can't do that. They have the resources. They have the department. They have the information in the regions. It's supposed to be centralized in addition to out in the regions. We all know that, Mr. Minister, so instead of blocking access to information here, I wish the minister would provide it. If it takes him some time to pull it together, that's fine, but in fact we need this information.

We will not be supporting this amendment.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, I must admit to a great deal of surprise by the comments by the hon. member in opposing the amendment. In reading the amendment and reading the original question, I would come to the logical conclusion that the hon. minister of environment has gone to great lengths to try and make sure that he could accommodate the wishes of the member asking the question and provide the information that she requires from the database and from the information that's available to him.

When I read the amendments, it clearly just reconfigures the

question so as to make it answerable given the nature of the reorganization of the department and clearly offers to continue to provide the information that was requested both in terms of inspections -- and it even broadens it -- and investigations. It clearly provides for an answer to the question that she's asking, and I'm really surprised at her comments about not bringing forward the information. If she doesn't want the information with the amended question, we can certainly vote against it.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MS CARLSON: No. Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

head: Motions for Returns
3:10

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 142, 143, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 157, 158, 163, 165, 168, 169, 180, 181, 182, 183, 185, 186, 194, 195, 200, 201, 202, 203, and 205.

[Motion carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M142. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the letters from Triple Five Corporation and the fax cover sheet sent by Hugh Tadman to the former acting superintendent of the Alberta Treasury Branches on May 24, 1994, as cited on page 40 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: Thanks. [interjection] Glad to be back, Madam Speaker.

I look forward to the quick concurrence of the government, particularly the minister of advanced education, in supporting this motion for a return.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With respect to Motion for a Return 142, I would indicate, as I will be indicating for motions for returns 143, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 157, 158, 163, 165, and 168, that the government will be rejecting these motions.

I'm not going to repeat the discussions that we've had on previous Wednesday afternoons relating to the reason for rejecting these motions. All of these motions relate to information relating to West Edmonton Mall and the Auditor General's investigation into West Edmonton Mall as requested by the Provincial Treasurer and by the government. We've made our points with respect to the information on past occasions. I'm not going to belabour the time of the House,

although I wouldn't want to hear again the member opposite indicate that by my reticence to repeat the same arguments over and over again, I was somehow diminishing the importance of the House. I do not. They could be very important questions, but the government's response has been provided on Wednesday afternoon after Wednesday afternoon. So on all of those questions I'll be indicating that the government will be rejecting.

I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to couple the questions together so that we can deal with this matter expeditiously in the House this afternoon. I would invite him to do so.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate on Motion for a Return 142.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks. Questions often asked and never a satisfactory answer provided, Madam Speaker. The fact is that the Auditor General's report is incomplete. The Auditor General's report does not contain details on some of the major players and certainly doesn't contain information on some of the documents that we now know are in a safekeeping place someplace within the Premier's office. So there are many, many questions that Albertans have, about a half billion dollars worth of questions, about who the loan arranger was. What the government is trying to withhold from Albertans is beyond me, because the Treasurer has said that they want to be open and the Premier has said that they want to be open.

When the Auditor General was invited in, we were told that all the information would be put before the people of Alberta. In fact, nothing further from that has happened. The truth is that the Auditor General has made it very clear that he will not be commenting on his report. He has made it clear that this report, this special-duty audit, is now the property of the government of Alberta, and it's up to the government of Alberta to talk about the government of Alberta's role.

The Auditor General's report did not exonerate the government or the Premier. What the Auditor General said is that he could not find direct evidence of improper political involvement. He could not find direct evidence. He also says that he didn't have an opportunity to examine all the evidence. We also know that there are documents being held that the Auditor General may or may not have had access to. We don't know what documents the Auditor General had, because the government won't even provide a list of the documents that were in fact given to the Auditor General. The Premier has a clever device by saying: well, we gave the Auditor General everything he asked for. But if the Auditor General didn't know what documents may be held by the Executive Council, what documents may be held by the Premier, the Auditor General couldn't have asked. So the Auditor General probably asked for something along the lines of: please give me what you've got.

Well, we don't know that what the Auditor General received was everything, was exhaustive. In fact, we have some suspicions it may not have been, because this is the same office, the Executive Council office, that failed to respond to a legitimate freedom of information request put in by the Official Opposition. It was just less than a year ago that the Official Opposition put in a request to the Premier's office, and the Premier's office said: we don't have any documents on the West Edmonton Mall. In fact, we found out that wasn't true, and that led to a special investigation by the Privacy Commissioner in which the Privacy Commissioner found that the Premier's office violated the government's own freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation.

So, Madam Speaker, it's very clear that we are left wondering what it is that the government still holds, what it is that they gave to the Auditor General, what it is that the Auditor General was

referring to when he said that he couldn't find any direct evidence, and what information there is that has surfaced subsequent to the February report of the Auditor General. The government can manoeuvre around this all they want. The fact is that time and time again legitimate questions are being asked of the government to come clean, and time and time again the government does not rise to the challenge and instead tries to pretend that there's no issue. If the government wants to continue to do so, I suggest that they do so at their peril.

I will continue to give the government opportunities to live up to their word and to be forthcoming with the information. I would hope that the government whip isn't applying undue pressure on all of the government supporters and that people will vote with their conscience and in fact will support this motion for a return so that we can begin to get the shreds of evidence that Albertans are demanding be put into place and so that we can all get to the truth of what happened.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M143. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the August 8, 1994, and August 10, 1994, letters from the former Deputy Premier to Genra Canada Investments Inc. as cited on page 44 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: Thanks. On page 44 of the Auditor General's report we are told that just prior to the first mortgage maturity, the then Deputy Premier wrote to Genra, who was representing the senior bondholders involved in West Edmonton Mall financing, not once but twice and warned of the economic effect that the action by the bondholder group would have on the Alberta economy and directly requested Genra to again attempt a consensual work-out with Triple Five. After writing these letters, there does not appear to have been any further involvement in WEM refinancing by [the then Deputy Premier].

But, Madam Speaker, the fact is that this correspondence would help us understand what the current government thinking was prior to the Deputy Premier's removal from cabinet. Obviously some decisions were made after he left cabinet.

In fact, I believe it was the Premier himself who took over the reins, who took over control of the Economic Development portfolio, which was the portfolio also being held by the Deputy Premier. So once the Deputy Premier was removed from cabinet, it was the Premier who took control of that portfolio, and it was that portfolio which had the responsibility for West Edmonton Mall. It's very clear to me that we need the correspondence to fully understand the sequence of events that led to the government setting aside the Genra deal, setting aside the Nomura deal, setting aside private-sector solutions, and instead opting for a public-sector intervention through the Alberta Treasury Branches. Critical information, Madam Speaker, and again, we're only teased about the contents of that information in the Auditor General's report. We don't have the whole story.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Reject. Read *Hansard*.

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

MR. SAPERS: No.

[Motion lost]

3:20 West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M145. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of draft memoranda prepared by the former Deputy Premier for the Premier of Alberta for the period February 14, 1994, to February 22, 1994, relating to the decision of the February 14, 1994, agenda and priorities committee on refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 36 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, the February 14 meeting, the Valentine's Day meeting, in 1994 of the agenda and priorities committee dealt specifically with West Edmonton Mall refinancing. It was as a result of that meeting that the February 22 memo, which found its way into the *Banksters and Prairie Boys* book long before the government released it or at least even acknowledged its existence -- the February 22 memo was about that meeting. Apparently at that meeting cabinet or at least the agenda and priorities committee decided that they were going to set aside the private-sector financing.

Then a memo from the Premier to the Treasurer and the Deputy Premier, the minister of economic development and tourism, said: make sure that we do everything possible to facilitate a made-in-Alberta solution. We know that there was not even a consensus about what the made-in-Alberta solution could be or would mean. It seemed to be code word for something, but we weren't entirely sure what.

So this motion for a return, again, asks for some information that would help us understand the thinking that was going on in cabinet at the time and what led to that now infamous February 22, 1994, memo.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Reject. Read *Hansard*.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'd just make the observation that I thought was made so tellingly by my colleague for Edmonton-Glenora a few moments ago and on previous Wednesdays. The point is this. So long as the Premier refuses to share with members of this Assembly the statutory declaration which he apparently swore -- we only have secondhand, thirdhand information for this -- we will continue to not have the full evidence. [interjection] The Minister of Economic Development was not here, obviously, when we discussed before the limitations with the statutory declaration coming in. I'm happy to point out to that member . . .

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

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

MR. HANCOCK: On a point of order, 23(h), (i), and (j). I believe the hon. member is making allegations that are entirely inappropriate. The Premier himself, which is firsthand, indicated that he

signed a statutory declaration and provided it to the Auditor General. So for the hon. member to suggest that he only has it secondhand or thirdhand that a statutory declaration was provided is clearly an allegation against the Premier's integrity, and he should be asked to be very careful about how he says these things and to withdraw that type of allegation.

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

MR. DICKSON: Well, we have a question of debate in terms of whether we have firsthand knowledge or secondhand knowledge or thirdhand knowledge. That doesn't come within any of the citations that have been referred to by our colleague opposite. I'm happy to debate what the significance is of a statutory declaration, but it is certainly no point of order, Madam Speaker.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Madam Speaker, I believe that the rebuttal from the hon. member opposite is inaccurate. He clearly said that he had it on secondhand and thirdhand information as to the statutory declaration that was prepared by the Premier. The Premier has answered that question in question period in this House -- it's in *Hansard* -- on several occasions, that he in fact has filled out I believe it's a 16-page statutory declaration and that it has been filed. For the hon. member to come back and say that this is a debate on statutory declarations is not the point of the point of order. It is the fact that he knows that that information has been filed. He's had it firsthand right from the Premier, who filled it out, and I think he should retract those statements right here in this House.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I would only provide the following comment to you for your consideration as you rule on this point of order, and that is that as I understand parliamentary tradition, if we are going to talk about documents in this Assembly, we have a responsibility to table them in the Assembly. While it's true that the Premier has said that he has filed a statutory declaration and given it to the Auditor General -- and we can all read the Auditor General's report in which he extracts parts of the Premier's statutory declaration -- we have never seen that. In a court of law I believe that would be called hearsay.

Now, I would just simply suggest that the Premier can't have it both ways. If we play by all the rules, in which case the Government House Leader's and the former Deputy Government House Leader's points are valid, then we should play by in fact all the rules, and the Premier should be required, based on your ruling today, to table this statutory declaration in the Assembly. Now, if we're going to be selective with the application of the rules, then I would suggest that there is in fact no point of order because we have no direct proof of the existence of at least the contents of the statutory declaration.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would ask the Assembly to wait just a moment here. I will give you a ruling.

One thing I would draw all members' attention to. If you do look at Motion for a Return 145, it doesn't mention anything at all in it to do with statutory declarations.

Under *Beauchesne* 494, "Acceptance of the Word of a Member." I would ask everyone that has a copy of *Beauchesne* to follow along.

It has been formally ruled by Speakers that statements by Members respecting themselves and particularly within their own knowledge must be accepted. It is not unparliamentary temperately to criticize statements made by Members.

But a member's word is a member's word. So in the case of the hon.

Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I do believe that when a statement of declaration has been made, we will in fact accept that as a member's word. I'm not part of the legal community, but *Beauchesne* 494 states there for all parliamentarians to respect that, and I would ask us to do so.

If you look at Motion for a Return 145, I would ask that our comments can pertain to what is written there in that particular motion for a return.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, of course if one looks at the motion for a return, the question is: why do we need the information? I thought that's what we were attempting to address.

MRS. NELSON: On the point of order, Madam Speaker. Based on your ruling, I think a very good ruling, I was hopeful that the hon. member was going to retract his statements on the record, based on *Beauchesne* 494, and clear the record in this Legislature -- that has not occurred -- before the debate on the actual motion for a return continues.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, if there's some confusion, I'm happy to acknowledge that the Premier said that he had sworn a statutory declaration. He acknowledged that he shared that with the Auditor General. I accept that; that's not an issue. What's an issue is: what's the content of the statutory declaration? That has never been brought into this House. I haven't seen it. My colleague from Edmonton-Glenora hasn't seen it. Maybe the hon. minister has seen it. The issue is that if we can't see that statutory declaration and we have to rely on information from the Auditor General or that small group of people who have had access to it, we have to guess what's in there. Albertans should not have to guess in terms of this kind of liability.

3:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, it's always nice when one is dealing with a person that has been trained in the law, but I did just say a few minutes ago that *Beauchesne* definitely says that we will accept the word of a member. A statutory declaration, in my opinion, is that member's word, and we have in fact, as has the Auditor General, taken that, and it is not for us to question what is or what isn't there. The declaration has been given. The declaration has been made. So I would ask if we can move away from this. If you want to talk to me later or whatever -- I don't have the knowledge or expertise that you do being a lawyer.

I do believe that we need to get off this particular topic and move on to what is in Motion for a Return 145. We have a number of them to go yet, and I will be ruling you out of order if I hear anything more about the statutory declaration in regards to these motions for returns.

MR. DICKSON: Well, with respect, Madam Speaker, let's be really clear. I accept that a statutory declaration has been sworn by the Premier. The Auditor General has told us that. What we do not know is what's in the statutory declaration, and I'm sure that what your concern is and what is fair comment is that it would be not accepting the Premier's word if we were to assert there was no statutory declaration. That's not the case. I accept that there was a statutory declaration.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The point being, then, hon. member, can we get beyond this, please, and move on to Motion for a Return 145, that doesn't talk in the least about anything to do with statutory declarations. The declaration has been made. I don't want to hear

anything more about it, whether it be firsthand, secondhand, or thirdhand. I want to deal with what is before the Assembly now, please.

MR. DICKSON: I'd be delighted to do that, Madam Speaker, and in terms of dealing with Motion for a Return 145, that also means that nobody else can make reference to it. What it means, then, is we have to talk about the . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: What it means, hon. member, is that you can't make reference to it as coming firsthand, secondhand, thirdhand, which you did before. We are accepting a statutory declaration for what it is. Okay?

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I've made no reference to . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: No. I have made the ruling, hon. member. Now, let us get back on the debate on the motion for a return, please.

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, that's precisely what I'm doing. If one looks at Motion for a Return 145, it asks for some documents . . .

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

THE ACTING SPEAKER: We have another point of order, raised by the Provincial Treasurer.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Nonmember

MR. DAY: Under the Standing Order, which is very clear, that allows a member to ask for a ruling. I realize I would not want to put the chair on the spot at this point, but it appears to me -- and it would probably require reviewing the Blues -- that the member has also challenged an official of this Assembly, that being the Auditor General. It is the Auditor General who said: I have reviewed the statutory declaration; I find no evidence whatsoever of political wrongdoing. We are hearing a challenge about one of the officers of this Assembly, and I would request and ask if the chair could review and see whether in fact the member is out of order in putting forward that challenge.

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

MR. SAPERS: I believe that the Treasurer was rising under 13(2), which gives authority to ask the Speaker to justify a decision, and then raised some other issues which had nothing to do with your decision. You're going to have to guide me through this. Under 13(2), in asking you to justify your decision, I would join with the Treasurer in wanting some extra clarity. The government has mentioned the statutory declaration in their argument in the rejection of not just Motion for a Return 145, but the Government House Leader then enumerated a whole list and has constantly said: read *Hansard*; refer back to what we said weeks ago.

Well, if you go back, Madam Speaker, what you'll see is that the government has repeatedly relied on the statement by the Premier that he has filed a statutory declaration to the Auditor General which has satisfied all the information requests, and that's why they don't feel compelled to provide any information in the Assembly. So it's

not the Official Opposition that introduced the matter of the statutory declaration into these debates around written questions and motions for returns. It's the government.

Now, Madam Speaker, I know that you would not deny us the opportunity to respond to the government entering that into the debate, and I'm confident that was not the intent of your ruling. As long as the government is going to be relying on the existence of the statutory declaration to reject these motions for returns, we of course should have the opportunity to speak to the gaps that exist in the information around that statutory declaration.

On the other matter introduced by the Treasurer, which was that somehow my colleague was questioning the Auditor General, that is a stretch that even I have trouble keeping up with, and I've been pretty creative, as you know, from time to time, Madam Speaker. The fact is that the Auditor General never said that there was no evidence of any wrongdoing. What he said is: I can't find direct evidence of inappropriate government interference. His words were much more carefully chosen than the Treasurer's words were. In fact, the Treasurer's words were I think unfairly and unnecessarily provocative and violate other Standing Orders of this Assembly.

MRS. NELSON: Which ones did he violate?

MR. SAPERS: The ones about not being provocative in debate, Madam Minister of Economic Development, and I think you understand provocation.

Madam Speaker, while you were ruling, I had asked you, of course, for your guidance on whether or not the Premier would be called upon through your judgment to table the document that he has cited or referred to in the House. You have properly referred to *Beauchesne* 494, and of course if you read just a little bit further down the page, you'd see *Beauchesne* 495, where it is very clear that a minister -- and that would include the Premier -- "is not at liberty to read or quote from a despatch or other state paper not before the House without being prepared to lay it on the Table." Now, the Premier has in fact given answers which he says are in the statutory declaration, and it is in fact a state paper because it is now part of the audit papers that make up the Auditor General's report.

So, Madam Speaker, I hope you will now provide guidance and instruct the Premier to immediately be prepared to table his statutory declaration in this Assembly, just so we can all be consistent.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, the Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: The hon. member indicated that he had the ability to stretch, and indeed we've seen that he does. He stretched a considerable amount with those last remarks. Clearly 495 does not require the Premier or anybody else to table a document which is alluded to but not quoted from. I have sat beside the Premier virtually every day of this session, and never once have I seen that document. If you haven't seen it, I don't know how you can quote from it. In any event, that point of order was not raised at a relevant time, so it's totally irrelevant to this discussion.

The other thing which I'd like to clarify in terms of the points made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora is that in responding to these questions, I have consistently indicated that all the material was provided. He's suggesting that my response has been premised on the fact that a statutory declaration was filed, and that's just inaccurate. What I have indicated is that all the relevant materials have been provided to the Auditor General and that the Auditor General has reported. I don't hang any hat on the statutory declaration. I've said that all of the documents have been provided.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Regarding this particular point of order raised by the Provincial Treasurer, it takes up to 20 minutes for the chair to get a copy of the Blues. So I would have to defer making a ruling on the particular subject at hand, which was the Auditor General. I would definitely want to read the Blues. I'm still going back to *Beauchesne* 494, where it has been ruled that a statement made by a member will be accepted as the word of the member. I stand by that.

I will have to say that if we don't quickly move on here and get to the meat of the matter on Motion for a Return 145, I am going to lose my patience somewhat. We have a number of motions for returns which, I have heard many times in this Assembly, are important to some members of this Assembly. I believe today is the day that we're doing them. Thus far we have dealt with seven since approximately 2:50 this afternoon. I do believe that we need to move on here.

I would ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to continue debate on Motion for a Return 145. Let's move on so that we can in fact vote on this particular motion.

3:40

Debate Continued

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Madam Speaker. Coming back to Motion for a Return 145, the information that's sought here in terms of the draft memoranda, it's important that that be shared with Albertans. It is of absolutely no consequence that that may have been provided to some legislative officer. The key is that Albertans don't have access to it. We are their forum, so I think it's an appropriate request, an appropriate motion for a return, and I'd encourage all members to vote in support of it.

Thank you very much.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M146. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the handwritten note of the former Deputy Premier to the Premier recording the decision of the February 14, 1994, agenda and priorities committee as cited on page 36 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. HANCOCK: Reject.

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

MR. SAPERS: The Auditor General's report makes specific reference to this note. In fact, I'll quote from the Auditor General's report as it quotes from the handwritten memo. This is a memo written by the former Deputy Premier to the Premier, and it reads as follows.

As per yesterday's conversations my understanding is:

- (1) the "arrangement" between TB [ATB] and Gentra is to be parked i.e. stopped.
- (2) TB and T-5 are to start talking and working towards a positive resolution.

If TB wants to, it can raise the necessary \$ for T-5 (at commercial rates with a benefit to TB), put a complete first mortgage on T-5 and buy all the creditors out. The province guarantees the TB now.

Madam Speaker, the existence of this handwritten note seems to confirm the worst suspicions about the decision being made not by the Treasury Branch but in fact out of the Premier's office to finance the West Edmonton Mall and to use the Treasury Branch as the vehicle to do so.

Now, we can have a discussion whether it is appropriate or inappropriate political interference with the Alberta Treasury Branch, but it is clearly interference. It is clearly not arm's length when a note to the Premier is saying, "If TB wants to, it can raise the necessary \$ for T-5," meaning Triple Five. Madam Speaker, this is a critical piece of information, and I would suggest that Albertans should be able to see it firsthand. The meat of the information is of course in the Auditor General's report, which is a public document. The government would probably be made to look good if they complied with this motion for a return. They'd appear, of course, to be forthcoming and transparent. Given that they have nothing to hide, they should present this document to Albertans.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M147. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the briefing document about the proposed Gentra Canada Investments Inc./ATB, Alberta Treasury Branches, arrangement presented to the February 14, 1994, meeting of the agenda and priorities committee as cited on pages 34 and 35 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. HANCOCK: Reject.

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

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M148. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of briefing documents, memoranda, correspondence, and background documents prepared for the January 24, 1994, February 1, 1994, and February 8, 1994, agenda and priorities committee dealing with the refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 34 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. HANCOCK: Reject.

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

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, the Auditor General makes it very clear that not once, not twice, but three times he was made aware that the most powerful committee of government met to discuss the government's involvement in the financing of this private-sector venture, of this shopping mall. It's a half billion dollars that we're talking about here, and as the Premier has said, that's a sizable amount of money. In fact, it's almost as much money as the Premier is bragging about putting back into education.

Madam Speaker, the money that was given to West Edmonton Mall we also know was discussed at not just the three meetings that the Auditor General refers to but at least at three other meetings that the Auditor General didn't refer to or perhaps didn't even know about, that we have only learned of because of freedom of information applications, where the government has grudgingly acknowledged that other documents exist that aren't cited in the Auditor General's report. Even though they exist, they won't release them

to the public, and we have no idea whether these documents were in fact ever turned over to the Auditor General.

I would just, once again, invite the government to live up to its word, do the right thing, be forthcoming with the information, and make good on its promise to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth about its involvement in the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M149. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the portions of the minutes of the January 24, 1994, February 1, 1994, and February 8, 1994, agenda and priorities committee dealing with the refinancing of the West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 34 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. HANCOCK: Reject.

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

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I'm losing count of how many times this government has refused to live up to its commitment to tell Albertans everything about its involvement in West Edmonton Mall. But I will, rest assured, be going back and reviewing the record, counting it up, tabulating it, committing it to paper, and making sure that taxpayers know about it.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M150. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of letters, memoranda, and briefing notes between the former Deputy Premier and the Premier for the period October 29, 1993, to November 1, 1994, relating to the West Edmonton Mall refinancing.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, there are several documents that we are after. They cover several different ministries, and they cover a fairly wide time frame. Of course, what this shows is that this was not just an incidental discussion that took place within cabinet but that in fact there was a sequence of discussions and that this was high on the list of things to be discussed by government during that time period. At this time there were rallies to save hospitals and concerns about cutting back kindergarten funding at the same time that Albertans were losing their jobs who had built careers in the public service, all in the name of financial restraint. At the same time all that was happening, this government was meeting behind closed doors trying to figure out how it could funnel a half billion dollars to a shopping mall.

3:50

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We, of course, will be rejecting this question, as we will 157, 158, 163, 165, and 168. I reiterate those ones in order to once again invite the hon. member opposite to assist us with the progress of the House by moving this forward and moving all of these motions in bulk.

He can count those rejects in any bitter and twisted way he might want to in terms of portraying it to the public. The fact of the matter, Madam Speaker, is that the government of Alberta has been open and honest with the people of Alberta about the whole process and indeed has asked for an independent inquiry by an officer of the Legislature about the whole process. That officer of the Legislature has come back, having reviewed all of the documents in context, which I'm sure the member opposite wouldn't do if he had access to the documents he's requesting today, and on the basis of reviewing them in context has provided a report which speaks for itself. I won't even attempt to quote the good things that he says in that report, but the report speaks for itself.

I would invite the hon. member to get on with life, to move past this quest, and to move all of the motions that are referred to so that we can get on with the other business of the House.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora to conclude debate on Motion for a Return 150.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much. The Auditor General did not review all of the documents, Madam Speaker. He only reviewed the documents that were provided to him, and we don't know what those documents were. So that's the first inaccuracy in what the Government House Leader said.

The second thing is that if he wants to refer to all of the things that the Auditor General said, he could talk about the fact that there was no commercial viability, that there was no apparent rationale for the government decision, and that the government intervention wasn't a successful intervention. There are many, many interesting, interesting conclusions reached by the Auditor General in the report.

I wonder if all members of the Assembly have read the Auditor General's report or simply the government's spin, the government's news release, on the Auditor General's report.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M157. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of minutes of meetings between the Premier of Alberta, the former deputy Premier, the former acting superintendent, and the Ghermezians for the period October 1, 1993, to November 1, 1994, relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on pages 31 and 32 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. SMITH: Do you just think these up at night or something?

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Labour asked me if I just think these up at night. Yes. Unfortunately the government's involvement in West Edmonton Mall has kept me up at night and has caused some sleeplessness for me, and I imagine it should for anybody in the government who's concerned about the proper use of taxpayers' money.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, I can only say that I have to, as I indicated before, reject the question. I would again implore the hon. member to speed up the process of the House by moving the balance of his motions in bulk.

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

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M158. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of portions of minutes from the February 14, 1994, meeting of the agenda and priorities committee during which the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall was discussed.

MR. HANCOCK: Reject.

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

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M163. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of written briefings or notes as well as written representations from the Ghermezians provided to the February 14, 1994, meeting of the agenda and priorities committee relating to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 11 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes, Madam Speaker. That would be another Edmonton-Glenora reject.

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

MR. SMITH: Not an Edmonton-Glenora reject. Is Ian McClelland going to run in Edmonton-Glenora? I think so. Adios.

MR. SAPERS: I really want to respond to that, Madam Speaker, because Ian and I have had -- oh well, it doesn't matter. We'll talk later, Minister of Labour.

Madam Speaker, Motion for a Return 163 is a very critical request again, because it really is at the heart of what the government may have been thinking and is about why West Edmonton Mall was eventually financed by the Alberta Treasury Branch and what it was that the government was so afraid of when they decided they couldn't accept eastern lenders. The real irony here, of course, is that eventually the credit facility was issued through the Toronto-Dominion Bank, which the last time I looked was an eastern lender. So whatever it was the government was afraid of didn't seem to stop them from getting into bed with the Toronto-Dominion Bank at that time and the loan being guaranteed by the Treasury Branch subsequent.

The government rationale that's been provided for other rejections doesn't seem to hold water when it comes to this motion for a return, but I guess they have this one-size-fits-all defence, and whether it's appropriate or not, whether it looks good or not, whether it fits or not is immaterial to them. The one thing that I've learned about one size fits all is that it usually fits none. Once you put it on, it looks pretty sloppy, Madam Speaker, and that's what we're faced with here today.

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M165. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of briefings received by the former deputy Premier from Hugh Tadmán between December 1993 and August 1994 related to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as cited on page 12 of the Report of the Auditor General on the 1994 Refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, February 1999.

MR. HANCOCK: Reject.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can't believe how arrogant this government is in saying no to these motions. They won't even give any reasons or explanations for why the information won't be provided, except for the catcalls and the feedback that we're getting from people who don't have the courtesy to stand on their feet and put their opinions on the record. I'm sure that if they heard the reasons for what happened, they would be very interested in that information too. So I would ask the government to show everyone in this Assembly and those reading this record afterwards some courtesy by giving them some information about why these motions are being rejected.

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

[Motion lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M168. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of letters, memoranda, and briefing notes between the former deputy Premier and the Premier for the period October 29, 1993, to November 1, 1994, relating to the West Edmonton Mall refinancing.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will again reject this question, but only in deference to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, who obviously wasn't paying attention or listening, I would reiterate . . .

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Edmonton-Ellerslie.

4:00

MR. HANCOCK: Edmonton-Ellerslie. I'm sorry. I am sorry.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Edmonton-Mill Woods is over there.

MR. HANCOCK: You're Edmonton-Mill Creek, yeah. I wouldn't want to malign anyone in the House, but I would want to make the point again that earlier on in this sequence today I had responded to a similar question, as I have the previous Wednesday and a previous Wednesday before that and I think, but haven't checked, it might have been a previous Wednesday before that. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora indicates one size shouldn't fit all, but how many variations of a question can you put on the Order Paper on the same subject? You could have put one question on asking for all the types of information, but no, we had a myriad of questions asking for one piece or several pieces of information each.

I responded, I think, to the rationale for rejecting these questions very clearly, very concisely and indicated that I didn't wish to waste the time of this House stating the same argument again and again and referred, if you might have been listening earlier, hon. member, to the fact that you could read *Hansard* if you wanted the reasons for the response.

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

**Point of Order
Allegations against a Member**

MS CARLSON: Standing Orders 23(h), (i), and (j). He's imputing motives to me that clearly aren't accurate. He has no idea of the information that's been shared or accessed here before. Clearly, I pay attention to what goes on in this House. Clearly, I think all questions should be answered, and I am quite upset at the inferences that he would make here.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, this chair rules that there is not a point of order. A question was asked of the Government House Leader to provide a reason for exactly why a number of these have been rejected. He was doing so once again.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MR. DUNFORD: Oh, we've got a filibuster going on.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. minister, that wouldn't be an interjection; would it?

MS OLSEN: The hon. minister of advanced education seems to have a lot to say, but it doesn't seem to have a lot of substance, which is unfortunate. [interjection] Nothing new; that's right.

Madam Speaker, people sit here and ask: why all of these motions for returns? Well, the simple answer is that if the hon. minister of intergovernmental affairs feels that there's nothing to hide and that everything is on the table and it's open and accountable, then why not put the rest of the information that isn't in here on the table? That would be the appropriate thing to do.

MR. HANCOCK: On the point of order under 23(h), (i), and (j). I would just like to correct the record. She's making the allegation that I made a statement which I didn't make. I didn't ask: why all these questions? I understand perfectly why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora wants to ask all these questions. I simply made the comment that they could have been asked in a manner which would have allowed a debate on the subject and then appropriate rejection of the question based on the reasoned arguments. Instead, we had a myriad of questions asked. I did not -- and I want to be perfectly clear -- question at all why the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora might wish to ask these questions.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Norwood, we are debating Motion for a Return 168 as listed on the Order Paper. I felt your remarks were more in keeping with the remarks made by Edmonton-Ellerslie regarding the point of order. We are debating a motion for a return that is printed on the Order Paper. During debate it's usually reasons as to why it should or should not be accepted. Can we proceed accordingly, please.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will in fact do that. I

believe this information should be available on the pretense that this government is open and accountable. We can sit back and make all the suppositions we want, but we would really like to make the accurate comments. Given that, this piece of information helps Albertans understand what is going on. It removes the cloud that's out there from the report, and believe me, there is a cloud. So given that, I think it would be appropriate for the government to provide that information so we can all move on.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I think the Government House Leader just said it all when he suggested that perhaps the questions could have come in a different form, that they could have all been bundled up together maybe as one question, and then he'd give us the reasons for rejecting it.

It seems to me that this government has an absolute closed mind, made up its mind before it has even heard the question. It just doesn't want to tell Albertans what went on. Madam Speaker, I guess that's becoming manifestly clear, but we're going to give the government a chance still, for a few more occasions, to do the right thing and to change its mind, have an open mind, and in fact tell Albertans what they were up to.

Now, the fact is that the Government House Leader -- and I hope he wasn't trying to give the impression that this is the only time these questions have been asked. I know the Government House Leader is an honourable man and that he's not trying to trick anybody in this process, but the fact is that in correspondence to the Premier, in correspondence to the Treasurer they have been asked by myself and by others to provide all the records, to provide all the documents. There have been public requests for a judicial inquiry. There has been correspondence that has called for a judicial inquiry. There have been requests and motions made in Public Accounts to refer this matter to that committee. In fact, there have been freedom of information requests on these matters. No matter what avenue we pursue, this government stonewalls us on the issue. So it is a little bit disingenuous to suggest that we hadn't asked for this information in a comprehensive way.

Madam Speaker, I'm not taking any pleasure in using private members' time to ask these questions to this level of detail. In fact, I just wish that the government would live up to its own words. Provide the information, provide the answers, and I will withdraw the rest of the written questions and motions for returns that not only are on the Order Paper but that I have waiting to make it onto the Order Paper, because the questions are endless. I can assure you and all members of that. The questions won't stop until we get the truth.

I would just simply remind the government that they've had many opportunities to answer the questions, and once they answer the questions, we can then move on. But until they answer the questions, Madam Speaker, this is where we're at.

[Motion lost]

Motor Vehicle Licence Plates

M169. Ms Olsen moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies undertaken between January 1, 1988, to March 1, 1999, by the Department of Municipal Affairs, the Department of Justice and Attorney General, and the Department of Transportation and Utilities on the merits of requiring motor vehicles to display a single licence plate or two licence plates.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege and responsibility today to respond on behalf of the ministers of Justice and Transportation. If I may, I'd like to make the following comments, and I'd also like to indicate it has been a pleasure to discuss this matter with the hon. member opposite.

I could give several pages of rhetoric about the issue entirely, but I will confine my remarks to indicating that in fact there are no copies of studies available from January 1, 1988, to March 1, 1999. I'll review the cost of reintroducing a two-plate system, which has been reviewed in terms of costs. It was estimated to be in the order of about \$3.8 million based on 1.9 million vehicles requiring plates within a two-year window. Prior to discontinuing the two-plate system, verbal discussions took place with key provincial law enforcement personnel and other interested stakeholders, and there were no significant objections.

However, Madam Speaker, clearly with the centennial of the province of Alberta and with the work that is being done with those involved with Transportation, Justice, and Municipal Affairs, there is some discussion going on and will be going on about the review. At such time as we have something further to report to this House, we would be pleased to bring and table that information and provide it for the hon. member and those on the other side of the House. In the meantime, because there are in fact no studies, I would on behalf of our government be rejecting the motion.

4:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Norwood to conclude debate.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This request for information came as a result of many conversations I've had with rural Albertans and the concerns they have for property crimes and suspicious people in the neighbourhoods, particularly in those areas that were hard hit by so-called terrorist activity and vandalism. What results from that is an inability to capture the licence plate number on a vehicle when traffic is going in two directions. That may seem insignificant to any of us, and even in an urban setting it's not as critical from a policing perspective as it might be in a situation in a rural area where there are fewer people living. So that's why the concern has been brought forward.

There are real concerns from Rural Crime Watch groups and victim services groups where, as I said, it's more of an issue. I would hope that we could look down the road and try to reconcile the needs of rural property owners and industry owners with the cost savings that incurred as a result of removing the front licence plate. I would suspect that if we looked at the actual property damage, the actual cost of thefts, and looked at insurance and looked at the cost of the police investigation, if we took all of those factors into account, it would far exceed the actual cost of maintaining the two-plate program.

I realize that the hon. member doesn't have any studies to show us, and quite frankly I don't know if anything exists that would support one plate versus two plates across North America, but I think it's something that we should consider. It certainly would help people in rural areas with their fear of crime and those issues around public safety.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Employment Standards Decisions

M180. Mr. Sapers moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing all Department of Labour employment standards umpire decisions for calendar years 1997, 1998, and 1999.

MRS. NELSON: Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Labour I'm please to accept Motion for a Return 180.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

Year 2000 Compliance

M181. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the minutes of the meeting held on October 6, 1998, organized and chaired by the Alberta government's chief information officer and attended by Alberta Transportation and Utilities disaster services and over 60 senior representatives from key public- and private-sector organizations to discuss the potential impacts of Y2K, Year 2000, computer and equipment problems on essential services.

[The Speaker in the chair]

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services I'm pleased to accept Motion for a Return 181.

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

MR. SAPERS: My thanks to the minister and acknowledgment of the efforts being made governmentwide under that department's leadership to grapple with the scope and the scale of the Y2K issue and how it will affect the taxpayers and citizens of Alberta.

[Motion carried]

Year 2000 Compliance

M182. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the government's Y2K, year 2000, consequence management plan developed by Alberta Transportation and Utilities disaster services as referenced in an October 9, 1998, government news release.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'd move an amendment to Motion for a Return 182. The motion as amended would read as such:

... the progress of the government's Y2K, year 2000, consequence management plan being developed by Alberta Transportation and Utilities disaster services as referenced in an October 9, 1998, government news release.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's motion asks for the year 2000 consequence management plan that is presently being developed by the Department of Transportation and Utilities disaster services as referenced in an October 9, 1998, government news release. This management plan is still being developed and will be released to the public in the very near future, just as soon as it is completed.

However, Mr. Speaker, a number of related documents have already been completed and been made available to the public. We're prepared to table the various completed documents to highlight the progress of the management plan. In addition, I wish to note that these documents are already available via the Y2K

Alberta web. The site is at www.y2kalberta.org/. The provincial government is a facilitator for and a member of that group.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans can take comfort in the knowledge that the provincial government and municipal authorities are working hard and have been doing so for many months to ensure that contingency plans will be developed for potential emergency preparedness, consequences of the year 2000 computer program. The Alberta emergency plan and the municipal emergency plans are required by the Alberta Disaster Services Act and are in place. These plans, along with the excellent emergency preparedness framework which exists in Alberta, will help to ensure that any consequences are identified, prepared for, and responded to in a competent manner. As we move closer to January 1, 2000, Alberta disaster services, with its partners in the provincial, municipal, and federal governments and the private sector, are refining the picture of potential problems and will ensure appropriate response measures are established.

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

MR. SAPERS: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Transportation and Utilities for dealing with this request and for having his staff contact me to explain the reasons for the amendment and for giving me some advance warning. I really do appreciate that co-operation. I'm gladdened to hear about the progress on the plan. I'll be supporting this amendment and looking forward anxiously as we get ever closer to January 1, 2000, for this plan to be released to the public. I know that it will continue to be a work in progress even once it's released because there's going to be some feedback. I know the minister is sincere about wanting to hear that feedback quickly and work it into the overall scheme.

Thanks.

[Motion as amended carried]

Year 2000 Compliance

M184. Ms Carlson moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the Department of Labour's year 2000 project definition that outlines a high-level plan for addressing the department's year 2000 risks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thanks so much, Mr. Speaker. As we have with motions 180 and 184, we're accepting. We're going to table not only that, but in quick response to the Minister of Economic Development's acceptance of my Motion 180, we'll also be tabling the motion for a return on that. On Motion 184 we're tabling an assessment of systems needs and actions necessary to deal with the year 2000, in each case in hard copy and unfortunately not electronically. So we're accepting.

4:20

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

MS CARLSON: We would like to thank the government for the information.

[Motion carried]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With motions 180 and 184 we're tabling responses now.

Year 2000 Compliance

M185. Ms Carlson moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the Department of Labour's year 2000, Y2K, contingency plan.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Just to keep them on their toes, we're rejecting this one. The department is currently preparing a business continuity plan. The plan will address recovery of operations as a result of emergencies, service disruptions, and included with the plan is contingency planning arising from year 2000. The plan is not yet finalized.

We're currently developing an action plan for each core business area, Mr. Speaker, and of course when it's been completed, reviewed, and endorsed by the department's senior management committee, we expect the plan to be available for senior management consideration in July of '99, and we'll deal with it accordingly. So we're rejecting.

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

MS CARLSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We would have been happy to accept an amendment that said that we would receive the contingency plan when it was available. In the absence of that, we will be asking again for this information in July, when it's ready.

[Motion lost]

Labour Year 2000 Compliance

M186. Ms Carlson moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing the Department of Labour's year 2000, Y2K, assessment and comprehensive plan to address identified problems.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Accept.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you.

[Motion carried]

MR. SMITH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member referred earlier to reasons as to why we would have to wait till July. Well, I'm about to table one of the reasons. It's of course the careful and assiduous compilation of an important document.

Thank you.

Campus Alberta Partnership Initiative

M194. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the Campus Alberta partnership initiative as outlined in the Department of Advanced

Education and Career Development's 1998-99 business plan.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would indicate that I have received correspondence from the minister on this.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, to deal directly with the motion as presented, I want to advise the member and the House that Campus Alberta was not mentioned in the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development's business plan. Further, I would advise that in its 1999 to 2002 business plan Advanced Education and Career Development is working with others in the development of a Campus Alberta vision work plan which would include specific initiatives, and I believe that we have forwarded those to the member. But as it relates back to Motion for a Return 194, we thus must reject the motion.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the minister for the information. Although the motion for a return referred to an item that wasn't actually in the business plan, they were courteous enough to provide information. I appreciate that.

[Motion lost]

Youth Connections Projects

M195. Dr. Massey moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the request for proposals for the two Youth Connections pilot projects and the resulting audits after the completion of the projects as outlined in the Department of Advanced Education and Career Development's 1998-99 business plan.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the motion asks for copies of proposals for two Youth Connections pilot projects. I want to inform the House that these in fact were pilot projects, and therefore proposals were not issued, then, for these Youth Connections pilots. We therefore will be rejecting this motion.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess I'd only indicate that I think it's unfortunate that they were pilots, that there wasn't a request for proposals, and if they don't exist, then I obviously can't have the information.

Thank you.

[Motion lost]

Endangered Species Conservation Committee

M200. Ms Carlson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the minutes of each meeting between January 1, 1997, and February 16, 1999, of the Endangered Species Conservation Committee and the independent scientific subcommittee established in accordance with section 9.1 of the Wildlife Act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a motion here that is written in such a manner that we can answer the questions, so we will be accepting it.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much. We appreciate the information.

[Motion carried]

Contaminated Oil Field Sites

M201. Ms Carlson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the most recent inventory of sites contaminated by oil field activity including their current status and a summary of any plans for remediation.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, this one does give a little bit more difficulty, so we find it necessary to amend so that we can provide a list of upstream oil and gas sites that have been subject to substance release. We have to strike out "sites contaminated by oil field activity including their current status and a summary of any plans for remediation" and substitute "upstream oil and gas sites, with substance releases, and a summary of the Department's approach for ensuring the remediation of the sites" after "inventory of." So the motion will read:

... a copy of the most recent inventory of upstream oil and gas sites, with substance releases, and a summary of the Department's approach for ensuring the remediation of the sites.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, this change concerns us a little bit. It then makes the motion quite general in nature, and we are particularly interested in the current status of contaminated sites and plans for remediation. I'm wondering how much of that information will now be included, if any, in this change. We will support the amendment but with the hope and anticipation that the minister will be able to provide a little more detail.

[Motion as amended carried]

Fish Population Statistics

M202. Ms Carlson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the most recent statistics and evaluation on the status of fish populations in the lakes in the northeast boreal region of Alberta.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, once again we find it necessary to make some amendments. Actually, we rejected one similar to this last year. What the hon. member is asking here would require just a horrendous pile of work, a major task, to gather all that data. We want to amend it so that we can give the hon. member as much information as possible to possibly answer her questions but something that is reasonable. We need to strike out "copy of the most recent statistics and evaluation on the status of fish populations in the lakes in the" and substitute "list of the year and the type of fish sampling programs that have been conducted at specific" and add "since 1984" after "of Alberta." The motion now will read:

a list of the year and the type of fish sampling programs that have

been conducted at specific lakes in the northeast boreal region of Alberta since 1984.

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

4:30

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again we have some concerns about the amendment. What we need here is information on the current status, not a history lesson. Yes, it's true we asked a similar motion for a return last year, and we will do so again next year. The current status is important to us in terms of what's happening here. Perhaps the minister and I could talk at some point about how the information that they do have could be streamlined so it doesn't put undue stress on his staff in terms of trying to assimilate the information.

What we really need is the information that tells us about the outcomes of sampling studies. If that helps give some direction, then good. Maybe we'll get the information that will be the most beneficial to us. We don't need to know just that there was a study done. We need outcomes and current status for monitoring purposes.

We will accept this amendment and hope that by providing this additional information, the minister will be able to meet the information requirements we are asking for or work towards that end in the coming year.

Thank you.

[Motion as amended carried]

Grande Alberta Paper Ltd.

M203. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any surveys, statistics, and reports completed since January 1, 1995, indicating the timber supply that is available and being reserved for allocation to Grande Alberta Paper together with the assumptions made in establishing harvest levels, including growth and yield information, reforestation standards, areas set aside for future nontimber uses, and all other information pertaining to the estimation of the annual allowance cut.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, once again we find it necessary to amend this motion. We have to clarify the information that has been collected to assess the conifer available for Grande Alberta Paper and also to correct some of the terminology. So there are a number of them.

We need to strike out "any surveys, statistics, and reports" and substitute "the reports." Then (b), add "namely, the Grande Alberta Paper Joint Fibre Supply, July 31, 1995, and the Joint Timber Supply Analysis, November 1996" after "January 1, 1995." Then (c), add "conifer" after "indicating the." Then (d), strike out "together with" and substitute "which include." Then (e), strike out "standards" and substitute "assumptions." Then (f), strike out "future," and (g), strike out "allowance" and substitute "allowable."

The motion will now read:

. . . a copy of the reports completed since January 1, 1995 -- namely, the Grande Alberta Paper Joint Fibre Supply Analysis, July 31, 1995, and the Joint Timber Supply Analysis, November 1996 -- indicating the conifer timber supply that is available and being reserved for allocation to Grande Alberta Paper which include the assumptions made in establishing harvest levels, including growth and yield information, reforestation assumptions, areas set aside for nontimber uses, and all other information pertaining to the estimation of the annual allowable cut.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, in the spirit and nature of cooperation, as we've demonstrated all afternoon, even though the amendment does water down the substance of the original motion for a return somewhat, we will support it.

[Motion as amended carried]

Oil Field Waste

M205. Ms Carlson moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the most recent inventory of oil field waste in Alberta, including inverts and/or oil-based drilling mud, and the methods being used for their disposal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environmental Protection.

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Energy we will accept this motion.

MS CARLSON: We thank the government for that information.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 205

School (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Act, 1999

[Debate adjourned April 20: Dr. Pannu speaking]

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is one of these rare privileges where I can speak out in this House and speak wholeheartedly in favour of a bill that has come from the government side. Now, I'm not saying that all their bills are bad. There have been quite a number over the years that we have supported, but this one is particularly refreshing.

We of course realize that the 400 hours of kindergarten were restored. However, it was never entrenched in the form of legislation. I just want to go through the history a bit here, Mr. Speaker, if I could. If we go back to 1973, kindergarten was first funded as part of the public education system. In '93 there were the educational roundtables, and no one advocated slashing kindergarten in half at that time. However, in '94 the existing government cut funding for kindergarten by 55 percent.

There was an uprising. The Alberta Liberal caucus, for one, immediately encouraged Albertans to really, really think about what was happening on this issue and to make their views known. One of our members back then, the member representing Edmonton-Centre, actually introduced a private member's bill. Finally in the latter part of 1994 the government blinked. The Premier of the province blinked on that issue, and they allowed boards to offer 240 hours per child per year.

The following year our Leader of the Opposition at that time introduced Bill 202 to again restore and entrench the 400 hours. In that same year, in the latter part, we saw the Glenora Parent Teacher Association gather over 20,000 names on a provincewide petition, very similar to what we see happening at the present time with our

Save Our Schools petition that's going throughout the province like a forest fire. I would hope the same thing happens with the SOS petition. At that particular time, the following year the government announced that the 400-hour funding would be restored for the '96-97 school year. Again in that year the Member for Edmonton-Centre introduced an early childhood services bill to entrench the 400 hours.

That brings us up to the present, where we have the 400 hours of kindergarten but not entrenched, and we have a government member from the riding of Calgary-East who has the vision to recognize the importance of entrenching that so that some government down the road, possibly even this government, doesn't have second thoughts and go back to a reduction of the existing 400 hours.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think anybody in this House can deny the importance of education, particularly at those early, early ages. I know at times we like to refer to the good old days, when for myself, for example, there was no such thing in my time. Maybe that's why I'm disadvantaged when compared to my grandchildren or my son, who had the opportunity for a much superior education than I might have had.

Again we'll make the comparison that in the good old days we had eight classrooms in one school. We did, but it's a whole different ball game. There's now a recognition that early childhood schooling is very, very essential in terms of providing for the type of education that our young people need in preparation for going out there to compete not only on a provincial basis and a national basis but on a global basis. We're no longer just competing within the province or our country. We are competing on a global basis, so our young people have to be prepared as they go out there and meet the challenges. They have to have the proper skills, the proper education, and they have to start at the appropriate age.

4:40

One could say: well, if we don't have publicly funded kindergarten, what happens? If we have only 200 hours a year instead of the 400 hours, what happens? What happens is that those families that have the money will supplement by sending their children to a private kindergarten. Then you introduce a two-tiered system within the educational system at a very, very early age when those students become disadvantaged. Even as they enter grade 1, grade 2, they're always behind those that had the opportunity for a sufficient level of kindergarten. We have to recognize that. We have to recognize that there are those parents who are in the situation where they can say: well, fine; if government doesn't do it, we're going to ensure our children get it.

We have an obligation as elected representatives to recognize probably the most important priority there is in the province of Alberta right now, and that is addressing the needs of education. The government for some reason didn't seem to have any hesitation when it came to addressing the concerns expressed by the private schools in wanting additional funding. That was done. Why there is a reluctance to do something that -- and I hope there's not a reluctance.

I would have a hard time understanding why there wouldn't be a total acceptance within this Legislative Assembly by all members to accept a motion by a government member that doesn't cost any additional money, because we're not talking in terms of increasing the 400 hours that are presently funded. We're simply saying to entrench it, to assure those young people and to assure the families of those young people that their children will have the opportunity to have the same type of education as others who have the dollars may have.

Myself, I have three grandchildren. One is at the age that they

will be going into kindergarten next year. Two have already gone by that. They've been fortunate. They've escaped those cuts at that particular level, although they are feeling the cuts now at Rideau Park school, where every second day, it seems, I have to buy almonds or something to supplement an activity. And I do. I had a box of almonds here earlier that I was passing around where the proceeds go to the Rideau Park school.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to go off on tangents here on the total field of education, because we're talking about a specific bill. But it is so important when we talk in terms of education at that level because that does set the tone for a number of years to come in terms of the elementary school system, the junior high, the high, and the postsecondary. We have to recognize that kindergarten is the foundation for lifelong learning. There are a lot of people who would even advocate -- in Ontario, for example, where my niece has children going to school, they have a program prior to kindergarten, early intervention, which they enter at that level. Then they go into the kindergarten program, and then they go into their elementary.

We haven't really got that early intervention, so we have fallen behind. I know government members who like to talk about us having such a superior education system. It's not true. You compare ourselves even to the province of Ontario, which has gone through probably more massive cuts than this province has, but they have still recognized to a larger degree the need for education at that particular level.

Again, the question of universal opportunity and equity becomes very, very important to ensure that all children at that age have the same opportunity. We have that parity throughout the province and also recognize that the students from Alberta have the same opportunities as the other provinces so that, again, they can compete on a fair basis.

From the point of view of families, by having it entrenched, it gives them a degree of certainty. It's much more difficult for a government to turn around and take something out once it's in because of the protests that would occur, because of the opportunities that opposition parties have in fighting that. But if it's not entrenched, the government can just by a budget cut basically reduce it from the existing 400 hours a year to 200 hours a year.

Mr. Speaker, as I begin to wrap up here, again I want to emphasize that I commend the Member for Calgary-East for bringing this bill forward. The Liberal opposition of course have brought similar legislation before this House before that has been rejected, but because it's coming from a government member, we accept the fact that it has a much better chance of passing the necessary stages in this House. Of course, that is dependent on the government members. I think it's safe to say that every member within this caucus has the foresight, the vision that the Member for Calgary-East is demonstrating in this particular instance, and I would venture to guess that members of the third party would probably also be on board in terms of supporting this particular private bill.

I would be quite shocked for any government member to stand up and oppose this piece of legislation and to go back to their constituents, look them in the eye, and say: I have denied your children an entrenched opportunity. As elected representatives let's just stop and reflect what our obligation is, why we are elected. We are elected to provide a number of benefits and services to Albertans, and one of the top ones, one of the very top ones -- health care right now is under a crunch; let's face it -- over the 10 years that I have been here has consistently been the question of a high quality of education. For years it was number one. Then it kind of took a second seat to health care for a while. Now it seems to be emerging again as the major issue in the province.

All of us that are elected as MLAs have an obligation to respect

the wishes of Albertans, respect the wishes of our constituents, and there's no question, no doubt in my mind in this particular instance that if you went out there and polled Albertans as to how they feel about this particular bill, they would wholeheartedly support it. They would wholeheartedly urge their elected representative, their Member of the Legislative Assembly, to support it.

So on that note, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to conclude. Again I would just urge that, please, for the sake of our children, for the sake of our grandchildren, for the sake of children coming on board further down the road, don't say no to this bill.

Thank you.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise this afternoon to join the debate on the legislation that is before us. Bill 205 has raised some thoughtful debate before the House and brought forth some interesting ideas concerning education in Alberta. This bill has served to remind Albertans that education is a priority in our province and that we all hold a vested interest in our most valuable resources, our children. If nothing else, Bill 205 has encouraged Albertans to bring forth their opinions, beliefs, and concerns about early education in Alberta and the effect this legislation would have on their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I know that throughout the debate today we have thoroughly discussed all aspects pertaining to the content and the potential consequences of the proposed legislation. It is my understanding that there are three different issues before us today. The first is to support the availability of kindergarten for children across the province. The second would establish a concrete program for kindergarten in the legislation. Finally, it would legislate a minimum number of 400 hours of kindergarten in the School Act.

4:50

Mr Speaker, in researching other jurisdictions with similar legislation, it has been determined that, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, all other provinces have implemented a standard kindergarten program in their legislation with a minimum of 400 hours per year or an equivalent half-time program. In fact, some provinces have or are in the process of establishing kindergarten as a mandatory provincewide program. We simply have to look at the importance of development in early childhood in relation to building self-esteem and a positive attitude towards learning in order to convince this Assembly of the merits of Bill 205.

Alberta is much greater in size geographically than some other provinces and houses a large population. With these characteristics, Mr. Speaker, comes a greater degree of diversity and therefore a need for a greater degree of consistency in basic education. We need to use the role of government to ensure that all children are receiving quality education. This bill would simply stabilize the foundation of existing kindergarten programs through the legislation. The same flexibility that currently exists within the program would remain unchanged in order to accommodate the different regions of Alberta, the people who live in these regions, and their varying needs and priorities.

Some concerns which have been raised regarding Bill 205 refer to unreasonable expectations which may be placed on the rural school boards. In some areas a jurisdiction can be affected by sparse populations and the geographical distance between those populations. This is an important consideration, and in fact considerable flexibility does exist within the kindergarten program in order to accommodate the various needs of children and their families. The diversity of the province and geographical distance: we have heard examples of this earlier in the debate.

Mr. Speaker, kindergarten is provided in all school jurisdictions,

and it is at the discretion of the school board, upon consultation with parents, to decide what form of programs will be provided. The feasibility of a program offered in a traditional classroom setting is determined by the number of children wishing to attend, the traveling distance to school, and the individual needs of a child. Without a doubt, school boards will offer in-school kindergarten if the number of children enrolled merits a program.

Most parents across the province have the option of enrolling their child in a private, nonprofit kindergarten program if they prefer. This program may be organized by religious organizations, by community groups, or be programs with specific educational or other philosophies as long as they meet the requirements outlined by Alberta Education. In some rural jurisdictions parents may feel that sending their child a long distance to a kindergarten program would be too difficult at a young age. These parents may choose to send their child to kindergarten on a part-time basis and arrange for occasional in-home visits. They may choose to organize activities with other families in the surrounding community, or they may wish to educate their child at home. An appropriate program is decided upon by school boards and parents. These programs all meet common objectives as determined by Alberta Education.

The next part of Bill 205 that I would like to address is the establishment of a solid kindergarten program in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I understand that the development of a kindergarten program statement, kindergarten curriculum, and a parents' handbook has provided early childhood education with much stability. The formation of these resources is most definitely a positive step for children in their formative years, as it is human nature to continually search for improvement. Therefore, the next logical step would be to legislate the existing kindergarten program and reassure Albertans that we endorse early childhood education.

Legislating kindergarten would also provide greater equity for school boards, teachers, and students in Alberta. School boards would assume responsibility for kindergarten in communities where a private program is not offered. This would offer the security to families of always having kindergarten available in the community.

It has also been brought to my attention that legislating kindergarten would provide a consistent framework for teachers. This could ensure fair, equitable schooling throughout the province as teachers follow the guidelines set by the province, therefore meeting the expectations of children consistently from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Major stakeholders representing education in Alberta support the proposed legislation, and I feel it's a long time coming. The Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and parents have always expressed the need for a stronger commitment to early childhood education, specifically kindergarten. So as you can see, Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 has important consequences for education in Alberta and addresses an issue dear to many Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-East for giving us an opportunity to debate the principle of this bill and to bring forth the very pertinent issues of early childhood education. We've heard throughout the debate varying perspectives and numerous suggestions for a kindergarten program and the necessity of legislation. While we may not have come to a consensus on Bill 205, we have recognized that it is an issue that most definitely needs to be addressed.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, this bill has served a very important purpose. It has created discussion and reminded us that education is a top priority for all Albertans. With that in mind, upon reaching the end of this debate, I would encourage all members to seriously consider the points that have been raised by both sides of the House when making their decision on how to vote on Bill 205.

With that, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand and speak to this bill, the School (Early Childhood Services) Amendment Act, 1999. When introducing this bill on February 22, 1999, the Member for Calgary-East stated that

this bill would make it mandatory for all school boards in the province to provide a minimum of 400 hours of ECS instruction to all the children who wish to take it.

This presumably would be made available to every child prior to entering grade 1.

By the background given to me, I wonder what has changed over the past few years. When a member on our side of the House proposed a similar bill -- for example, in 1994, Bill 227; in 1995, Bill 202; in 1996, Bill 211, which asked for 475 hours. Four hundred hours, as per this amendment, isn't the 475 hours that we feel is a start and a must. It also is interesting that in 1994 Albertans had to fight with this present government, who slashed funding in kindergarten from 400 to 200 hours per child per year.

5:00

We now see in this bill participation at the parents' discretion. Parents may still be charged fees if they choose to participate in the program. Kindergarten is a foundation for an individual's journey of life. Learning and investing in kindergarten yields the highest returns from investment of any money invested in the education of our citizens. Early screening, diagnosis, and treatment for children with problems helps children and families sooner and saves society money in the long run.

As I talk to children while touring schools in my constituency, I talk about how important one's education is to everyone. An educated person is so important to society not only for a better future and financial independence to raise their families to improve our next generation, but an educated person is usually a healthier person, and a healthier person isn't as expensive on our health system. Today the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West made the statement that a healthier person is always an educated person, or hopefully vice versa, an educated person is a healthier person.

Our province, country, and world are under growing pressures to maintain industrial competitiveness in a global economy. Thus they are increasingly concerned about one of the most important resource bases that underlies it: human capital. As a result, they are being forced into re-examining the assumptions on which the education and training policies have been based, a trend which has been extended to the earliest years of a child's education.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

In his speech the hon. member from the other side talked about rural accommodation, and he said: well, to make this bill go forward and be such, put an amendment forward. I do know that an organization I spoke to last Saturday, the Lions Club, has a Vision Quest program, which is kindergarten to grade 12. This is around conflict management. Conflict management is a very, very important item to introduce to our children. Starting school, starting kindergarten, leaving the security of one's home, leaving the security of being with one's parent -- in most cases it's the mother -- is a very traumatic experience for a child. If there's something in place, a good program, whether it's kindergarten, whether the school's got the conflict management program, this is a program that should be there for children.

We look at road rage today, we look at bar brawls, we look at everything. If there's something out there that the child does not

have to look at and watch -- the cartoons of my day did not have the criminal violence effect that I think our cartoons are actually portraying today. I actually thought that my son and daughter-in-law were very strange due to the fact that they not only boxed up their TV and put it in the basement so the kids couldn't watch it, but a few days later to keep away from temptation they actually sold it. And I think my grandchildren, the three of them, will be better off for it.

Conflict management, like I mentioned before, is something that maybe the Alberta educational system should be looking at. I know that through the Lions Club there are a number of schools in Edmonton that are actually putting this program in. I'm going to help them more and more in northeast Edmonton, so maybe I can get it into schools in areas that are in dire need of somebody outside of nobody at home to take care of them.

While this government was on the path of paying down the debt, Albertans were forced to dance to the music of their one-string guitar. There is a general belief that education is not respected. What I mean by this comment is that without a plan laid out for Albertans, there's a feeling of distrust of this government in both the education and health systems. I believe that maybe what has not come through so far to make our health system and education system a cost recovery system is that somebody hasn't produced a robot to actually be in the human nature of being a teacher or being a health giver.

I do support this Bill 205, which includes kindergarten in the School Act. As a parent of children still in the school system and one year away from having my first grandchild starting kindergarten, I do believe that K to university is very, very important. I want the best education system we can have. Kindergarten is the foundation for an individual's journey of lifelong learning.

What is the foundation of lifelong learning? A solid foundation of early childhood education is necessary for an individual's success for lifelong learning. Universal opportunity and equality: while we cannot guarantee outcomes we can attempt to ensure that our youngest citizens have been given an equal opportunity to succeed.

Recent government policies have led to a patchwork of ECS programs and user fees across the province. A child's ability to benefit from early childhood education has become what regions of the province a child lives in and how much money his family has. I refer back to the comment about rural accommodation and busing and whatever. That is, we cannot be held ransom to an education of people that are close enough to attend these by that thought in place.

When we talk about "too costly": education and particularly early childhood education is simply the best investment we as a society can make. Paying for a good education up front can save society several times its initial investment. Failure to teach and socialize our children will result in a health socioeconomic problem, which will manifest itself into higher costs, like I mentioned before, in health. They can go back to the social service entity, the criminal justice.

Madam Speaker, as we talk about crime and we talk about gains, I have a portion of my constituency that has manifested into a very large gang-related family function. People have come in, family-wise, to Edmonton to be close to the maximum penitentiary, which is in my constituency, live close to the LRT, live close to an affordable area, and with them they have brought other family because their children have to be close to their cousins.

So it is a part of our social services that we have to be there for. If these children can get into early childhood education or into a school where they've got counselors -- and maybe this isn't the right way to look at it, but I do believe that the earlier we can get to these children, the earlier we can get them out into the world and socializing, maybe their life isn't headed in the direction that they have come from.

An unemployment system later on. We look at the trends and facts that we were given through the provincial government biweekly on unemployment. Figures can be skewed however we want, but we should be proud of the fact, if you can believe most of the figures that are given, that Alberta is doing very well keeping Alberta in the global market and keeping Alberta students out there so that even if they are the brain drain, they are helping other parts of the world. I do really believe that the unemployment system later on, not to mention the opportunity, costs individuals and society a whole lot.

At this, Madam Speaker, I'd sit down and take my leave.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise today to speak to Bill 205. I would like to begin by talking about education in this province. We all know how important a good education is for our children and the future of this province. The investment we make in our children today is investing in Alberta for tomorrow. The future generations of this province rely on a sound education system, a system which contributes to a strong, prosperous Alberta where everyone can participate and enjoy a superior quality of life.

For this reason education is a priority for this government. We recognize that in order to look to the future, our focus must be on quality education and early childhood initiatives, ensuring that Alberta's children have a good start in becoming healthy, productive adults.

Madam Speaker, the legislation brought forth by the hon. Member for Calgary-East is an example of our government continuing to improve our first-class education system. Alberta's focus is on the future, Madam Speaker, and for that reason Bill 205 needs to be considered in the context of current government initiatives. References to past government initiatives regarding kindergarten have been raised with some frequency surrounding the debate on Bill 205, so I would like to place the timeliness of this legislation into perspective for those who may not yet be convinced.

5:10

Much has changed over the last few years. This government established a plan and achieved its goal. Our province has progressed from a state of debt and excessive spending to fiscal responsibility and cost efficiency. When our government set out to balance the books several years ago, we made some tough decisions and trimmed costs in many areas in order to make life better for our families and for future generations of Albertans. Looking back, there's no doubt that it was a difficult time. All Albertans had to make sacrifices to get our financial house in order, but we listened to Albertans, and our government made a firm commitment to fiscal responsibility and stuck to the plan.

Today we can reflect upon the remarkable progress that we have made over the last five years. Alberta is now on solid financial ground. We have eliminated our deficit and have become the first jurisdiction in Canada to begin paying down our debt in a major way. An important factor in the success of our province is that although we realized that changes needed to be made, establishing priorities was the key.

Albertans place great value on the education of our young, and that is why reductions in this area were and continue to be far less than for any other part of government. Needless to say, improvements within the system were necessary to ensure that the focus of education was on the students. By reducing the number of school boards and capping administrative spending, more money was directed to the classroom. Working together, we have built a solid foundation in education, and now we are ready to commit to legislation such as Bill 205.

With the successes our government has achieved, we now emphasize the importance of striking the right balance between fiscal responsibility and quality of life for Albertans. We realize that there are pressures in certain areas, and we need to focus on them. In the past year we spent more money on education to help special-needs students and put more computers in our classrooms. We have established an education system second to none. Alberta students are top achievers nationally and internationally.

Our government has established a strong foundation for our children. We want our kids to succeed, Madam Speaker. It has always been my opinion that the government should provide services which keep the purpose in mind. I am confident that the objectives of Bill 205 are in step with our government's current initiatives. It is clear that the purpose of the legislation before us today would ensure a sound educational program for children in their formative years.

Madam Speaker, early childhood education has progressed considerably over the last few years. Continuity in the program has been established by initiatives such as the kindergarten program statement, a concrete kindergarten curriculum, and a handbook for parents of kindergarten children. It is my firm belief that provincial kindergarten guidelines are the foundation of a quality program. Kindergarten programming is effective in enhancing the social, educational, and economic opportunities of children. For this very reason it is most certainly worth establishing a fundamental program for early education of our children. In recent years we have taken the initial steps by creating a quality developmental and age-appropriate curriculum, and now the time is right to standardize a concrete program for kindergarten in the province.

Madam Speaker, early childhood education is viewed as preparation for grade 1. It contributes to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for setting goals, making informed choices, and acting in a way that will contribute positively to the child's own life and the life of the global community. There is strong evidence that early intervention, beginning in preschool, is a good people investment. Early intervention is cost-effective and provides life opportunities. Recognizing the importance of social, moral, physical, intellectual, creative, and emotional development in the child's early years will give our children the foundation they need for the future. Madam Speaker, it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that all families have access to the services and support needed to provide the strong relationships and rich experiences that give children a strong foundation for future learning.

Our province continues to reap the rewards of quality education. Our students are top achievers in Canada and amongst the best in the world. Madam Speaker, we want our young people to be the best educated in the country, able to achieve their individual potential and create a positive future for themselves, their families, and their communities. I firmly believe that the objectives of Bill 205 ensure an even stronger beginning for our students on their journey through formal education and establish an even stronger commitment to our most valuable resource, our children.

Having said that, I will be supporting Bill 205, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to do the same. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I move to adjourn the debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc has moved that we now adjourn the debate. Does the Assembly concur?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move that we now adjourn the Assembly until 8 this evening, at which time we will reconvene in Committee of the Whole.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:18 p.m.]