

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, April 22, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/04/22  
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others.

We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, for Canadians it's easy to take for granted certain principles of democracy like the principles of one person, one vote; freedom of speech; and the freedom to vote without being discriminated against. For many people in the world, individuals, notably from countries such as South Africa, had to fight, had to work, had to hope, had to dream for such freedoms. Sometimes those dreams were dreamed behind bars as they waited and looked for the day when they would enjoy democracy.

We have such a person with us today. Coming to power in 1994 with the Nelson Mandela team and then becoming the Minister of Finance of one of the newly founded provinces in South Africa, the province of Mpumalanga, is Mr. Lassy Chiwayo. We have had the opportunity, as Alberta has been asked to join in a partnership with the province of Mpumalanga, to work with budgetary matters and finance matters. It's been an exciting honour and privilege for us and for me to work with this particular individual. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we would warmly greet him, a freedom fighter and now a deficit fighter, the Minister of Finance for the province of Mpumalanga, the Hon. Lassy Chiwayo. As with any elected person, traveling with him is his trusty deputy minister, the head of the Department of Finance in the province of Mpumalanga, Mr. Sam Cronje.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly three individuals who are seated in your gallery. They are Terry Meade, vice-president of operations, Alberta, Shaw Communications Inc.; from Richmond Hill, Ontario, is Mr. Peter Neilsen, director of government and industry relations, Shaw Communications Inc.; and Ms Laurie Templeton, manager of government relations and regulatory affairs, Alberta, Shaw Communications. I'd ask all three to now rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table with the Assembly a petition signed by 97 residents of Edmonton and area. They are the SOS people who are petitioning the Legislative Assembly

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

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have a petition to table today signed by 35 residents of Edmonton. The petition urges the Legislative Assembly

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

head: Notices of Motions

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I wish to serve notice that at the appropriate time after the daily Routine I will be moving the following motion:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize the urgent need for . . . public debate on the imminent job action at the Calgary board of education resulting from this government's failure to adequately fund public education . . . to cover increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table this afternoon five copies of the Alberta Summit on Justice final report.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling today five copies of a memorandum sent to all principals of the Catholic schools in Calgary by the chief superintendent of their system advising them that they must cut back by 15 percent for the rest of the year all nonsalary budgets for this year and they cannot hire substitute teachers for the remainder of this year. Also, the memo warned that 1999-2000 will be a year for retrenchments in spite of the increased budgetary allocations.

Thank you.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table a letter which I wrote yesterday to the Premier with respect to the issues facing Calgary parents and students.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today five copies of the Alberta Boilers Safety Association 1998 annual report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of a press release being issued in Vancouver today. This release by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment concerns pollution prevention awards to four Canadian companies. Of note is the award presented by council chairman Ty Lund to Amici Enterprises Inc. of Calgary.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table today the appropriate number of copies of the Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal 1998 annual report. The Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal hears issues within its jurisdiction relative to disputes on Métis settlements, and I would advise the House while I'm tabling it that we currently have a review of their jurisdiction happening, and I'd invite members to get involved in that if they so wish.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to be able to introduce two schools from my constituency. The first is Ellerslie elementary. We are visited today by 36 students who are in grade 6, their teacher and my good friend Mrs. Phyllis Olson, and program aide Mrs. Toni Smith. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The second school here today is Holy Family school. These are also grade 6 students. This is a special school for me because both of my children have gone there. Today we have 58 students. They are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Juliet Lidstone and Mrs. Beth Devlin and by helpers Mr. and Mrs. Bud and Louise Arbeau. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly Sofia Arteta, an exchange student from Buenos Aires, Argentina, who is with us as a Rotary exchange student for one year. She's in grade 12 at Archbishop Jordan high, and she's also an international baccalaureate student. We are delighted to have her. I would ask that Sofia and her accompanying Rotarian Dennis Pommen please stand. They're in the members' gallery. Would you all welcome them.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a group of 32 visitors who are from the West Edmonton Christian school located in the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, a school that I am well familiar with and have visited several times. I'm going to have to visit it at least one more time because I was unable to join this group for a photograph earlier today, and I'm hoping they'll indulge me and allow me to deliver the photographs in person back in the classroom. At this time I'd like to ask teacher Andy Renema and student teacher Justine Demoor along with parent helpers Milton Walters, Margaret Brandsma, Betty Kits-Goldstein, Steve Wilk, and Jenny Kadatz to please rise along with the students and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

MRS. O'NEILL: It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two very valuable citizens and loving grandparents who reside in St. Albert. They are Mary and Gordon Smith. They are seated in the members' gallery. They are accompanied also by Sister Frances MacDougall, who is a former resident of St. Albert and currently lives in Castle Downs. It would be of note to all of us and to your guest in the gallery, Mr. Speaker, that Sister Frances' own sister Pat Mella is the Provincial Treasurer of the government of Prince

Edward Island. I would ask my three guests to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow, who's celebrating his 51st birthday.

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, would you like a gift?

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that my guests have arrived yet. My indication was that they'd be here at 2 o'clock.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, my guests are arriving at 2:30.

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

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this esteemed Legislature visitors from the county of Beaver and also from the town of Viking, famous for the Suter hockey family. We have seated in the members' gallery Mr. Garry Wolosinka, mayor; Pam Mykityshyn, deputy mayor; Gabe Brissard, town councillor; Rod Krips, town administrator; Colin Lang, county of Beaver councillor; Vic Istace, county of Beaver public works foreman; and Mr. George Roddick, fire chief. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

### Education Funding

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard the numbers \$380 million, \$600 million; we've even heard a billion dollars. This is the government's spin on how much it claims to be investing in our children's education, and it seems to grow daily. Now for the reality. Compared to five years ago, accounting for inflation and 50,000 more students, this government is investing \$500 less per student this year. Yes, three years from now \$600 million is a lot of money, but so is 50,000 more students, and because of this government's focus on the bottom line instead of the front line Calgary public's students, parents, and teachers are staring at a strike. My questions are to the Acting Premier. Why is the government investing less in our children's education? When does the Alberta advantage kick in for Calgary and Alberta students?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, spin it any way you want. The straight fact of the matter is that this year the increase to education over last year is 7.1 percent, far ahead, I'll have the member know, of both inflation and population growth. So any way you want to measure it, it is a considerable increase, and that continues out over the next three years, an average of an 18 to 19 percent increase. It's very significant.

Mr. Speaker, there are also other provinces who don't approach that per capita level of funding. It would be interesting to see how they manage as well as they do even as they look to our province to see how well we manage. There are also school boards that post reserves and surpluses, and it might be interesting for school boards to exchange information on that basis also.

MRS. MacBETH: The Provincial Treasurer's own numbers, Mr. Speaker. Why can't he understand that there are 50,000 more students in the system and a dollar in 1999 does not go as far as a dollar in '93? Parents understand it, teachers understand it, and children are being forced to understand it.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated the increase is considerable. We still haven't heard from the Liberals how much is enough. They always want more.

I think as a matter of record it's an interesting thing to note that when the leader of the Liberal opposition was the Minister of Education she funded 42 school boards that didn't even have kids in them.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Acting Premier wants to keep repeating inputs, that's fine, but when is he going to address the outcomes that parents and teachers or students are dealing with daily, like outdated textbooks, unsafe schools, unmanageable class sizes, teachers that are struggling? When is he going to start talking about those realities in our classrooms?

MR. DAY: Actually outcomes are very important, Mr. Speaker, and that's why among a number of outcomes that we do have in place are those related to achievement tests and of course departmental tests and international tests. In Canada of course, because education is a provincial jurisdiction, it's a little more difficult to measure direct outcomes from province to province.

The Leader of the Opposition may be interested in the results recently released in the United States. Now, I know it's always at some peril that we talk about the United States because we get accused of supporting different things, but of 50 states that registered -- it's fascinating to look because there they have national standards related to testing. The state that has the highest per capita funding scored number 29 of 50 states in terms of achievements, and the state that scored the highest of all states in terms of achievement was 27th in funding. So there are some interesting things possibly to be learned there.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, and it is the Leader of the Official Opposition that is being given the floor.

### Student Mental Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, to quote an educator from Fort McMurray:

In the 23 years that I've been teaching, I've seen the number of children experiencing serious personal problems increase dramatically. At the same time, as a result of education funding cut-backs . . . many schools have been forced to reduce counselling.

In this province troubled youth considered homicidal or suicidal may wait for over five months for treatment. My questions are to the Minister of Education. What is the minister doing to ensure that troubled youth are receiving the counseling services that they need in order to get the service they need through our education system?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think this is an important issue that has been raised by the Leader of the Opposition. We need only look at newspaper accounts of situations that have existed in other jurisdictions to realize that this is a serious problem. It is the kind of problem that does exist in other jurisdictions, but that does not mean we should turn a blind eye to the conditions that may exist that can give rise to suicidal or perhaps homicidal behaviour as the Leader of the Opposition has suggested.

Mr. Speaker, we do take this seriously. We have worked with our

partners, the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Teachers' Association, and other stakeholders to deal with issues as they relate to safe and caring schools. We are concerned about this. We think that many of the things we're doing are appropriate measures to try and prevent these situations to make sure that individual kids do get help.

I would agree with the observation of the individual quoted by the Leader of the Opposition that there are probably an increasing number of such children. It is a difficult problem to deal with, but it is a serious one and to the extent we can, Mr. Speaker, we're always prepared to work with our partners to deal with those issues.

MRS. MacBETH: What effort has the minister made with the Minister of Health to co-ordinate mental health services with services available for our students in the schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, that too is also a good question. The student health initiative should go a long ways, an investment by this government of 26 million some dollars, towards dealing with the co-ordination of efforts between health providers, social services, the Department of Education, and school boards. I've recently spoken with stakeholder groups about the student health initiative. There is a great deal of very positive enthusiasm for that initiative, and I think that as a consequence of the province putting in the money to make such programs go and the commitment of various school jurisdictions to ensuring that the level of funding they currently provide for programs that deal with the co-ordination of health services for students, it will be a very valuable addition to dealing with the types of issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Justice: has he been included in these efforts to assist troubled youth in the justice system who need to access mental health services?

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we also work closely with the Department of Health and the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education regarding these types of issues, and in particular through our young offender programs the Department of Education is very much involved in addressing the needs of youth. Both departments provide services to the young people who happen to be in our care and custody in our systems, and, yes, I'm happy to advise that we do work closely together.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

### Education Funding

(continued)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's undermining of children in our public and separate school systems is not limited to Calgary. Educators and families must cope with old, even dangerous schools in many smaller communities as they struggle to provide an excellent education for our students. Excellent local schools provide the foundation for future economic development in these communities and for the future of our children, yet this government is letting that foundation rot away. To the Minister of Education: given that safety inspection reports note that Exshaw school violates current building standards and would go up fast in a fire, what is the government doing right now to ensure the safety of students at Exshaw school?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, in all cases that relate to health and safety issues, that is our top priority for capital expenditures.

I wish to point out that the opposition has taken a tack of attempting to pick out schools and suggest that the entire school system is crumbling. That would be in my opinion akin to taking a look at a barrel of apples and then picking out the ones that were blemished and assuming that they were all blemished. Now they go even further than that. They're taking perfectly good apples and saying that they're blemished.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I've looked at a number of these situations where individual schools have been raised by members of the opposition. They talked about a school in Entwistle that had over 50 kids in a classroom. They failed to mention that there are two teachers that team teach that class. They cited a case in Niton school where there was a grades 4/5/6 split. There is no such 4/5/6 split in that particular school. The fact is that in that particular school there is one teacher for every 21 students.

There's a number of circumstances that they've raised; for example, the school that they talked about, R.I. Baker school. They indicated that we had taken no action on it. In fact, the improvement of that school has already been approved.

The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that we have a good education system that is occasionally excellent, and it would be most constructive if the members of the opposition would stop running down what is a very good education system.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, we're not running down the new school in his riding.

I do want to ask: when can a Stony Plain family paying over \$550 a year in school fees expect some relief from this government?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows and all members of the Assembly know that the matter of school fees is a matter for local jurisdictions. There are jurisdictions in this province where the fees that are charged on an annual basis are \$45 a student. The opposition ought not be allowed to draw the conclusion that there is any amount of funding that is less than appropriate for schools in this province, when in fact there are school jurisdictions that can charge less than \$50 a student per year.

MRS. SOETAERT: I think he's protesting a little too much, Mr. Speaker.

My final question: with Vanier community Catholic school in Edson operating at over 105 percent capacity, when can those students expect relief from overcrowding? Right now they can't even gather for an assembly because it violates fire regulations.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the capital projects that are approved in this province . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Education has the floor.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the issue of capital projects that are approved in this province is an important question. There are four criteria that are applied by the school buildings branch in determining the priority of school projects that are approved. The first one is with respect to health and safety issues, and I can assure members of this Assembly that all matters that relate to health and safety that are submitted by school boards are approved.

The second priority that there is for school capital projects is with respect to a critical need for new space. In all circumstances last year, Mr. Speaker, where school boards have submitted their capital projects where there is a requirement, a critical need for new space, all of those projects have also been satisfied for the current cycle of school approvals.

The third and fourth criteria, Mr. Speaker, are central modernization and noncritical need for new space. It is true that we have not satisfied every school board's requests for categories that fall within the third and fourth categories. We've satisfied some but not all, but when it comes to health and safety and when it comes to critical need for new space, we do satisfy those requests by school boards.

THE SPEAKER: On behalf of the NDP opposition, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

### Calgary Catholic School Board

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Education minister has been holding up the Calgary Catholic school board as a shining example of fiscal virtue and responsibility. Earlier today I tabled a copy of the April 13 memorandum from the chief superintendent which was sent to all school principals in the Calgary Catholic district. To the Minister of Education: if government education funding is indeed adequate, can the minister explain why the Calgary Catholic school district finds itself in such a desperate situation that the only way they can balance their budget is through such draconian measures as not hiring substitute teachers, reducing construction/maintenance expenditures, and charging students 25 cents a page for photocopying?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the first thing I'd like to point out is that the hon. member, who has asked I think a good question, used in the preface to his question the word "adequate." According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, adequate implies "sufficient" and "satisfactory," often with the implication of meaning barely so. It is our government's position that we should fund schools appropriately, and according to that same dictionary source it means what is "suitable or proper."

So with that clarification at the outset, Mr. Speaker, I wish to say that I have looked into this particular situation. The Calgary Catholic school board had initially predicted an operating deficit of \$2.7 million for the 1998-99 school year, out of which it planned to cover out of its available reserves \$10.7 million. A midyear projection recently revealed that the operating deficit may in fact increase to \$4.2 million. So the board is taking appropriate steps to keep the projected deficit down to the amount of \$2.7 million.

One thing that I wish to point out to the hon. member: to reduce the projected deficit the board is considering reducing costs for substitute teachers, but this is not a plan, from the information conveyed to me, this is not a proposal to eliminate all substitute teachers. Mr. Speaker, clauses in the collective agreement that cover substitute teachers will be honoured. There is a practice but not a policy that Calgary Catholic boards will provide substitute teachers for things like voluntary short-term absences like medical appointments. Those are the circumstances that are being referred to by example, but for example for long-term disability there will continue to be substitute teachers as required under the collective agreement.

2:00

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The superintendent's memo is clear about whether or not subs can be hired, so I don't need to repeat this.

Given that the minister considers that provincial education funding is appropriate and adequate, what does the minister say to students and parents in Calgary who are concerned about the fact that the Calgary Catholic board has concluded that it will have to make further retrenchment next year and the year after in order to maintain a balanced budget?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Catholic board in Calgary is one of the boards that I hold out as being a very responsible one, and the members that serve as trustees and the administration on that board are people that I have a great deal of time and respect for. Based on the average enrollment increases in the last two years, the government instructional and operating funding for Calgary Catholic is expected to be \$213 million this coming 1999-2000 school year. This is a 7 percent increase, or \$14 million, over the 1998-99 school year. This is a significant amount of money, and I expect that the school board, as it has demonstrated in the past, will be fiscally responsible with this money.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary is also to the minister. Does the minister think that the budgetary measures outlined in the Calgary Catholic school superintendent's memo should be adopted by all school boards facing deficits and trying to satisfy the minister's expectations?

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Education, there's a clear inference there for an opinion. That's not the purpose of question period. So, please, if you wish to proceed, fine. If not . . .

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the only thing that I'll say in response in that case is to say that we expect all school boards to be fiscally responsible. That is the reason why we elect trustees at the local level. I think this particular school board has taken a certain number of steps towards making sure that it can bring its spending in line with what its projected expenditures are. We would expect that all school boards would do the same thing, although not necessarily in the same manner that is set out by this particular school board. Each case will depend on its own circumstances.

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

#### **Calgary Teachers' Collective Bargaining**

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgary's public school teachers have rejected the latest contract offer from the Calgary board of education and have announced that they will go on strike as of this upcoming Monday. Parents of students in Calgary's public school system are deeply concerned about what may transpire for their children. To the Minister of Education: can he explain to the House what will happen to grade 12 students if there is a strike?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying that I'm hopeful that negotiations between the Calgary board of education and its local of the Alberta teachers' union will continue and that a resolution can be achievable prior to strike action commencing on Monday next. However, parents and children in Calgary are wise to begin asking questions about how they will be affected.

For graduating grade 12 students, Mr. Speaker, the most significant issue for them is the matter of diploma examinations. If there is a strike by Calgary's public teachers, there will be no interruption of diploma examinations. The Calgary board of education has committed itself to ensuring that these examinations will proceed. Through the board's computer database every grade 12 student will be automatically registered for diploma examinations in the event that there is a strike. The board, in co-operation with and with the assistance of my department, will also be informing students and parents of the arrangements that have been made for the writing of those exams.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear in my concluding

comment that grade 12 students will be writing diploma examinations.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: does the minister have the power to exempt students affected by the strike from diploma exams?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is yes. In special circumstances a student can be exempted from writing a diploma examination. This is done pursuant to the regulations set out in the student evaluation regulations, but this situation does not apply in a strike circumstance. Again, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary board of education has said that diploma examinations will go ahead, and my department will work with the board to ensure that happens.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Education. If there is a strike by Calgary teachers, what are the educational opportunities for students other than those in grade 12?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm advised by the Calgary board of education that in the event that there is a strike, the board will be taking steps to ensure that as many students as possible have the opportunity to continue their studies as effectively as possible. It is up to the school board to decide whether to open schools for study hall purposes, as an example. The school board may also provide students program access by registering with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre or by purchasing distance education and related materials for students through the Learning Resources Distributing Centre.

My department will work closely with the administrators from the Calgary board of education to ensure that public students are able to continue their education through any work disruption.

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

#### **Electric Utilities Deregulation**

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the woes of electrical deregulation continue on and on. This government's policy of . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Sounds like you wanted brownouts last night.

MR. WHITE: We could do with a little brownout in here, sir.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, you have the floor.

MR. WHITE: This government's deregulation policy, maybe more properly called deregulation policy, is getting more and more reminiscent of moving the deck chairs around on the *Titanic* than it is a new policy. There are absolutely no studies of the impact of electrical deregulation on consumers and the rates they pay. There is no information on how balancing pool payments are going to be distributed, and there is absolutely no bar set as to how high and what the determination of a successful option of a power option is. Today we shall try stable rate options. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. When a citizen can set a stable rate option for a five-year period, why are small commercial customers such as community leagues, curling rinks, charities, and nonprofit organizations only eligible for three years of coverage?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, if anybody in the province of Alberta

chooses to stay with a rate set by the company they're with today, if they want to stay for 20 years, they can. If you understood what the definition of stable rate was -- it just closed the gaps so that nobody had to make any choice for five years if they so desired. After five years or three years or two years or 10 years, they can still accept the traditional generator and through a marketer or affiliate buy that power. So I don't know what the question is about.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, it's difficult to deal with a minister that doesn't understand the legislation. The price does go up, sir. That's the difference.

Will the minister, then, answer this: how is the minister making this determination when a community league that has an ice service and has a 51 kilovolt amp need and requirement pays one rate and a 49 kilovolt amp user has a totally different rate and is not guaranteed?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, if he would share the information with me, maybe I could give you a detailed readout of how everybody's bill probably will vary in a deregulated market. I mean, you'll have people coming to individual players and saying: look; if you can regulate the amount of power you use at peak loads, say between 5 in the afternoon and 8 at night and you don't leave your computers or your air conditioners on at certain times in the summer, then you'll have a different rate than your neighbour who has six kids and indiscriminately leaves the power on all day long. The same with community leagues or other leagues. Some will pay, depending on their use of power, more or less than others.

2:10

There will be no absolute rate across the province like there has been in the past. This is going to be a wide open marketplace, and people will have choices in what they pay for power according to how they use power. I think it's going to be a tremendous marketplace. Yes, some power rates may go up. If people use excessive amounts of power at peak load times, power could be higher. People will have choices to cut their power bill maybe up to 15, 20, 30 percent depending on how they use power. I think that's the way it should be.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, if the minister will not answer the questions based on his own announcements, then there are no further questions to ask.

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

### Adoptions by Same-sex Couples

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is to the Minister of Family and Social Services. Today's headlines in the newspapers and on radio suggest that the Minister of Family and Social Services will be tabling legislation to permit gay adoptions. To the minister: will your proposed adoption legislation follow the *Anne of Green Gables* scenario, or will it expressly state that same-sex couples can adopt children in this province of Alberta?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we are proposing to bring forward to the Legislature is an amendment to the Child Welfare Act which will change section 59(3). Section 59(3) presently utilizes the term spouse. What we are looking at is one very simple change which would change the word spouse to stepparent. What this would recognize, as the hon. member has stated, is other types of relationships. The *Anne of Green Gables*

model that he referred to is where a brother and a sister actually raised a child. This will enable people in different types of relationships to apply for adoption.

I must caution the hon. member, though, that there still are vetoes that are available. For example, in any private adoption when a child is 12 years old or older, he has a veto over the adoption. The guardian of the child has a veto over the adoption. So perhaps the guardian would be the biological father, as an example. That biological father would still have a veto over the adoption.

Mr. Speaker, this is consistent with the approach that our caucus has taken when it comes to private adoptions, to get out of the business of private adoptions. Quite frankly there are vetoes available. If the people who are involved want their child to be in, for example, a same-sex situation, they have the ability to do that under the proposed legislation that we're changing.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, again to the Minister of Family and Social Services: does this change mean that the government is changing its position on having children who are permanent wards of the Crown fostered or adopted by same-sex couples?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, this has not changed the government's position. The government's position has always been what is in the best interest of the child. We have attempted to stay away from the politics of what is the best scenario for a child. We have quite simply said that we want to do what is in the best interest.

Again, with this legislative change what we are attempting to do is not have a judge read the definition of spouse into our 60 other pieces of legislation that contain the word spouse. Quite frankly there are numerous stepparent relationships in Alberta where two perhaps of the same sex, perhaps, as the hon. member has stated, a brother and sister have looked after children for five, 10, 12 years. These people are wanting to formalize that relationship. We feel that because it is a private adoption, government should stay out of that business.

MR. TANNAS: Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Justice. To the minister: I have constituents who are interested in the fact that the government is withdrawing from the same-sex adoption court case in Calgary but wondered whether the government will be paying for the costs of the third party which now wishes to intervene in this process.

MR. HAVELOCK: Mr. Speaker, we do not fund arguments through government that are brought by third parties in the courts of the province.

### Power Engineers Regulations

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, there are still more problems in the Department of Labour. My first question is to the Minister of Labour. Why were the changes to the power engineers regulations already decided upon several months prior to consulting with the very people it affects: qualified power engineers?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the power engineers regulation is due for review. It's as per the sunset clause, as has been clearly outlined by the government. It was originally drafted 24 years ago, in 1975. Public consultation began February 13, 1999, and is expected to be complete sometime in April. So we've done the normal consultation process, the distribution of a discussion paper, an advertisement placed in daily newspapers advising the general public. There's a number of issues involved in it recognizing the new technologies

that are out there, recognizing the new job duties, recognizing the power plants, appropriate levels of competency. We are at the stage where following public consultation, the regulation is developed in co-operation with industry.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, my next question will also be to the Minister of Labour. If the changes weren't predetermined, how does the minister explain this document from his department dated September 1998 in which the changes are already predetermined? Why have a consultation process when you've already decided?

MR. SMITH: That sneaky little member, Mr. Speaker, has actually got a copy of a public consultation document. I would look forward to him filling it out. He is a good person in the organization that he represents. I would hope that he would go carefully through that document and then start to fill it out and start to get involved in the consultation process. That's exactly what it's intended for.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, this document is February 1999. This one is September 1998. If this was supposed to be a working document, why wasn't it shared with all the power engineers across the province so they could help in drafting the changes that are so important to their livelihood?

MR. SMITH: The document is out there, Mr. Speaker. We've talked about public advertisements in papers; we've talked about working with the power engineers. As a matter of fact, we have a member in this caucus who's closely involved with the power engineers. I don't hear the question coming from this side. I think it's good of you to find the document available for consultation. Let's go to work on it, put some facts together, get involved. We look forward to hearing the member's input.

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

### Film Development Program

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend the Alberta Motion Picture Industries Association is hosting its 25th annual Alberta film and TV awards here in Edmonton. This industry contributes to distinguish itself not only in its cultural contribution but also as significant leaders in promoting the Alberta advantage. Through economic development, tourism, and technology this industry is key to Alberta's diversified economy. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Community Development. Given that the Alberta film development program was introduced by our government on April 1, can the minister give the Assembly an update on the Alberta film development progress to date?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first let me say on behalf, I'm sure, of all of the members in this Assembly congratulations to what we know as AMPIA on the 25th anniversary of their awards program.

I'm very proud to say that the Alberta film development program is working, that we've had 30 applications that have been received so far. I might add that they're arriving daily, and judging by the number of calls for information, I expect that demand to be strong.

Mr. Speaker, there has been about \$2 million of the \$5 million available in this program for this year that has been committed to filmmakers for productions that they will be mounting in Alberta this year. I should add that that \$2 million investment translates into

at least \$20 million of production in the province, an increase of \$8 million over the year's total production last year in Alberta.

2:20

MRS. BURGNER: My first supplemental to the same minister: who is eligible for the Alberta film development program grants, and how do they apply?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, there's a number of criteria which I would be prepared to share with all members. They must meet certain criteria. They must be Alberta-based, Alberta-controlled companies and/or be doing coproductions including such companies. It is administered through the Department of Community Development by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and certainly the foundation would be prepared to provide any member with that information.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, that a number of members in this Assembly worked very hard in ensuring that this very major industry remained in this province. I would particularly take the liberty of pointing out the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View, who led a very thorough review, worked with the stakeholders, as did many members, and I think we are seeing the results of that work today.

MRS. BURGNER: My final supplemental: given that the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services also contributes government support to the film industry, could that minister identify what resources are made available to the industry?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government is supportive of the film industry, and in addition to the Community Development programs we make available our facilities to the Alberta industry. We do have criteria which we follow to ensure that the facilities have an appropriate use to them. I might add also that during the past three years there have been some 26 uses of our facilities and only two rejections.

It's also worthy to note that we attract people from beyond our boundaries. I believe the TV series *Viper* was using a transportation building in Airdrie for a number of years during its production. Also just lately in Edmonton there was a movie called *Snow Day* being filmed at Government House and the park down below. That movie brought in some \$14 million, and that's by Paramount Pictures. So Alberta's opening the doors to people, helping the local industry, as well as bringing in others from the outside.

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

### Confidentiality of Health Records

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month surgical patient records for 32 patients in the Calgary health region were found blowing around a private yard in the Sundance subdivision at the other end of town from the hospital where they originated. This is disturbing, but what's even more disturbing is that this happened less than one year after very prejudicial mental health records were discovered in the old General hospital. My question is to the Minister of Health. What specific steps did the minister take to respect and protect the confidentiality of patient records after the last episode less than 10 months ago?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly these two situations with respect to a total lack of security, it would seem, with respect to sensitive health records is a reason for an area of concern. With respect to the situation at the General hospital during the planned

and acted upon demolition period, there was a case where records were left behind within the abandoned building. We from Alberta Health certainly were in contact with the regional health authority. They took the issue very seriously and followed up with their investigation.

I agree that it is of concern that a very short time in months after this we again have this incident in Calgary in a different venue, and once again we've been in contact with the authority over this particular incident. So I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, that I do not regard it as a good situation. I regret certainly that it has happened, and I think the regional health authority has certainly undertaken to track down what went wrong in this last case.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question would be this to the minister: well, since there had been a report done after the incident last year, which of those recommendations in that report were not implemented before the April incident, and if they weren't implemented, why not?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the questioner has admitted in his initial question, this is a very recent occurrence. I know that the health authority has taken this very seriously and is following up on the case, but to be very straightforward about it, at this point in time I do not think they have found the perpetrator or the base cause of this particular recent incident.

MR. DICKSON: Well, my final question, Mr. Speaker, is to the Minister of Labour. Given the fact that this government chose to take personal health information out from under the FOIP Act because there was a promise that there would be legislated privacy protection and we still haven't seen it two years after that promise was made, will the Minister of Labour now consider revising the freedom of information act to ensure that that protection exists now and not some years distant?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health may want to comment with respect to the health information act, but the member well knows from his participation as a member of your all-party select legislative committee on freedom of information that the report is in. I've discussed with him the fact that the amendments to the act will be coming forward next week. I look forward to not only discussion but debate with him. The agenda and the program are very clear.

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

### **National Highway Program**

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This province has been pressing the federal government for a national highway program for some time. I know that additional funding was put forward to health this year in the federal budget as that was a priority identified by the country's first ministers. My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. Can he advise the Assembly what progress if any has been made on getting Ottawa to realize the importance of a national highway program and placing a priority on infrastructure spending in all provinces?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A week ago this past Tuesday we had the opportunity as provincial ministers to meet with the federal Minister of Transport and the federal Finance minister as well as the entire Liberal caucus representing the transportation industry within the federal Liberal caucus. Present also were representatives of the Canadian Construction Association,

the Canadian Automobile Association, representatives of labour, representatives of the entire stakeholders of the industry. This was a very positive meeting, certainly the first meeting of this kind that was held that represented the entire stakeholders of the industry.

The indications were that indeed there was unanimous support of the provinces; there was unanimous support of all of the stakeholders that were present at that meeting for a national highways program that would be jointly funded by the provinces as well as the federal government.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. What kind of funding arrangement can Alberta expect from the federal government for our part of the national highway system?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Though there were no firm commitments made, the presentation that I made on behalf of the provinces was that we should develop a national highways program that would be jointly funded by the provinces as well as the federal government on a 50-50 basis. There was fairly lengthy discussion as to whether indeed that particular program should be delivered as an infrastructure program where there was partnership of municipalities, provinces, and federal government or whether it should be as a national highways program separate from the infrastructure program.

Because of the amount of money needed in order to do a project as far as national highways is concerned, it was felt that the two should be kept entirely separate, because indeed the municipalities simply don't have the resources to take on a major project and don't have the capabilities to take on the scope of a major project that would indeed allow for a major development as far as the national highways program is concerned. So it was agreed that if there's going to be an infrastructure program, which has been very successful up until now, it should be separate from a national highways program.

2:30

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question is also to the Minister of Transportation and Utilities. What is the next step in securing a national highways program?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: The presentation that the federal Minister of Transport as well as the federal Minister of Finance made was indeed that there has to be a recognition of the need for this particular program. The recommendation was that there be a communications process put in place that would allow for clear recognition that there is a priority need for this program.

Further to this, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that my colleague the Minister of Economic Development broached the subject at the economic development ministers' conference as well, and there was unanimous agreement. They have subsequently made representation to the federal minister that indeed there is an important criterion that has to be fulfilled here, and that is the importance of the national highways program to the economy of this country, to the social needs of this country, to basically the glue that brings the fabric of this nation together. It was agreed that by the year 2000-2001 the effort would be to try and include funding for this type of budgetary item.

### **Confidentiality of Health Records**

*(continued)*

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, the privacy of Albertans' personal health information is of such importance that I would like to ask the Minister of Health more questions with respect to the incidents of personal and confidential medical records being found blowing in



the wind in Calgary. My first question to the minister is: what exactly is the process of investigation for incidents where confidential medical records are found in parking lots in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the health care system of the province and the many professional and support workers that work within it and professionals who work in support of the overall health care system outside of the boundaries of hospitals and long-term care centres all I think realize the importance of the privacy and sensitivity of certain health information with respect to individuals.

In the case that has now been raised twice by questioners across the way, Mr. Speaker, this is a fairly recent incident. Certainly it is a serious matter to have this happen. The regional health authority is following up with respect to this particular situation. I'm sure that if there is any legal issue involved in terms of deliberate harm endeavoured to be caused to some individual or individuals, that will be taken through the proper legal processes. I think it is very important that the authorities have the opportunity -- and I'm sure they're taking it seriously -- to investigate what the underlying situation is.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, for the 32 Albertans whose medical records were in the parking lot, what disciplinary action has this minister taken in both instances where this has occurred in the last year?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if the member across the way has knowledge, has evidence that would help with solving this particular matter, aid in the investigation, I would think that if that is the case, then it is that person's obligation as a citizen of this province, as a person who has worked within the health care system to bring that evidence forward so that it can be part of the investigation, and the matter can be solved.

MRS. SLOAN: Mr. Speaker, given the repeated incidents of this occurring in the province, not once, not twice, 32 records blowing in the wind, why has this government as recently as last night opposed amendments to protect medical records in Bill 17?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the pending legislation, as the Minister of Labour has already indicated to the Assembly, there are changes to the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation being prepared for the consideration of the Assembly. I think that is a proper venue in which to deal with this, and certainly priority is being given to that. We also have the work that has gone on with respect to the overall health information and protection of privacy legislation being prepared through Alberta Health.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition knows full well that amendments are planned and intended to the act, and that is where the government will be addressing these matters.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, three hon. members have indicated their desire today to participate in Members' Statements, and we will call on the first one in a few seconds, but prior to moving in that direction, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: Then three introductions today in this order: first of all, the hon. Member for Little Bow, then the hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no better way to celebrate a birthday when you can't be at home with your family than to have 52 constituents with you, most of them school students from the Vauxhall elementary school. They managed to bring one more than my birthday today. I am really pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly from the potato capital of Alberta the students from Vauxhall elementary school along with their teachers. I'm sorry that I can't spot Mr. Terry Olfert, who has been here seven consecutive years with his class, and their other teacher, Mrs. Michelle Sawchuk, along with parent helpers Mrs. Linda Hobberstad, Mrs. Sanaa Zahalan, Mr. Terry Dell, Mr. George Friesen, Mr. Harvey Pepneck, Mr. Dennis Johnson, Mr. John Wilk, Mrs. Wanda Kolenosky, and Mrs. Diane Jeffrey. Would they please rise and receive a very warm spring welcome from the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the hon. members of the Assembly 27 students from the Westview public school in my constituency of Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world. They are accompanied today by Mr. Dionne and Mrs. Fleming and Westview teachers Mr. Dodsworth and Mrs. Rogers. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them all to rise now and receive the traditional welcome of our Assembly.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce three gentlemen from the forestry industry that have come to the Legislature to help the hon. Member for Little Bow celebrate his birthday as well. The hon. member's birthday is a very momentous occasion in this entire province. In the meantime I'd like to introduce three distinguished gentlemen from the forestry industry that represent a very, very critical part of our economy. I would ask Allen Ainsworth, Tim Ryan, and Dave Cook to rise and receive the usual cordial warm welcome of this Legislature.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities might refer to the 51st birthday of the hon. Member for Little Bow as being momentous, but all hon. members should know that very, very shortly, not today but very, very soon, the hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities will be celebrating his 65th birthday.

Might we now proceed to Members' Statements.

head: Members' Statements

2:40

THE SPEAKER: We'll call on, first of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

#### Hon. Edward R. Wachowich

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon in the Legislature to pay tribute to the Hon. Edward R. Wachowich, who retired recently, on January 31, 1999, after serving the province for 10 years as the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court of Alberta.

Chief Judge Wachowich is a native Albertan, born at Opal. He completed his education in Edmonton, graduating from the University of Alberta with a law degree in 1954, prior to his admission to the Alberta Bar in 1955. He then practised law in the city of Edmonton with the firm of Kosowan and Wachowich until 1985

when he was appointed to the Provincial Court bench. He was later elevated, in 1989, with his appointment as Chief Judge of the court.

During the term of his leadership of the court, the efficiency and the stature of the Provincial Court of Alberta were notably enhanced. One of the significant accomplishments during his watch was the acceleration of cases through the system to a conclusion in an average time of six months. As well, the qualifications for judges and for justices of the peace became some of the highest in Canada. He also participated in a new program establishing a branch of the court presided over by traffic court commissioners, which processed tens of thousands of provincial offences in the province and to this day, I think, is still the only program of its kind in Canada.

In addition to his duties in governing the administration of the court, Chief Judge Wachowich was called upon by the government to assist in reviewing and resolving some controversial issues over the past few years: the conflict of interest, the Electoral Boundaries Commission, and the judicial selection process.

It's very hard to summarize a distinguished career like that of the Chief Judge in a short, two-minute member's statement, but I can say that few if any other Albertans have had as much influence on the judicial system in Alberta as has Chief Judge Wachowich. On behalf of all members of this Assembly I would like to thank him for his dedicated service to Albertans over the past 10 years.

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

### Earth Day

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is Earth Day, the day when we remember the finite nature of our planet and the need to preserve it for future generations.

As caretakers of this planet we must safeguard the biodiversity that exists here now.

Environmental diversity is crucial because of the interdependence of living things.

Since this interdependence is not fully understood, human beings must be careful to respect and preserve all species in sufficient numbers. This means preserving their habitat as well.

Albertans enthusiastically embrace the vision of completing a comprehensive network of Special Places by the year 2000.

Albertans place a high value on unspoiled natural landscapes and the opportunity to be close to nature.

The priority of Special Places 2000 should be the protection goal - to include within the network of Special Places, the full range of natural landscapes, environmental diversity and special natural features of Alberta.

To the extent that they are compatible with the protection goal, Special Places should achieve the three parallel goals of heritage appreciation, outdoor recreation and tourism.

Some Special Places will be selected specifically because of the role they can play in assuring the survival of special species such as caribou, grizzly bears and some rare and endangered species.

That's what the Alberta Liberal caucus believes and supports, but I have not used my words. I am citing the 1993 report of the Special Places 2000 Advisory Committee. Unfortunately the government has deviated from what Albertans said they wanted. Unfortunately the government has now drafted legislation, Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act, that will make it even more difficult to get back on course. There is still time to save species and their ecosystems. It is an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable development. Our failure to do so will not be forgiven by future generations.

On Earth Day we remember that time is running out, and I call on the Alberta government to return to the vision that inspired the

special places program and to become inspired by what we can still save.

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

### Canada Book Day

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to recognize Canada Book Day, which is tomorrow, April 23. The goal of this day is to promote Canadian authors and Canadian books. This special day was initiated by the Writers' Development Trust of Canada in 1995 when UNESCO declared World Book Day, which is celebrated around the world.

In Alberta we have much to celebrate on this day. If you scan the list of past Governor General award recipients, you will find that Albertans are very well represented. Names of Alberta authors like Rudy Wiebe and Greg Hollingshead are recognized both inside and outside of literary circles around the world today. Many of these writers' careers were nurtured through the literary arts programs of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. The Alberta book publishing industry, also supported by the foundation, should also be recognized on this occasion.

To celebrate Canada Book Day, libraries across the province are displaying Alberta and Canadian books. Some of Alberta's bookstores are offering discounts and presenting readings by authors, and local newspapers are devoting space to information on Canadian books, authors, and trends in writing.

Another significant day for Alberta authors and publishers is coming up this weekend on Saturday. The annual Alberta book awards co-ordinated by the Writers' Guild of Alberta and the Book Publishers Association of Alberta will be recognizing Alberta's writers and publishers.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this Assembly to take our cue from the Young Alberta Book Society, affectionately called YABS. Their mission is to celebrate excellence in Canadian literature and foster literacy and a love of reading among young people in Alberta. It is an honour to pay tribute to this great occasion.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the government advise us as to the projected government business for the ensuing week.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm looking at Monday, April 26. In the afternoon we'll be dealing with . . . [interjection] If the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert would like to know what she'll be doing next week, I'd appreciate her listening. In the afternoon we'll be dealing with second reading on bills 26, 30, 31, and 32, and as per the Order Paper. That evening we'll be in Committee of the Whole dealing with bills 27, 29, and 15.

On Tuesday at 4:30 p.m. we'll be dealing with second reading on bills 34 and 28; that evening, second reading on bills 22, 24, 23, and 25, and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday evening, Mr. Speaker: third reading on bills 18, 21, 14, and 17, and Committee of the Whole on bills 12, 16, and 15, and as per the Order Paper based on what I assume will be significant progress on Monday and Tuesday.

Thursday afternoon we will be giving Royal Assent to bills 8, 9, 10, 11, 33, and 202 and then reverting to as per the Order Paper. Under Government Bills and Orders, second reading on bills 35, 37, and 36, and as per the Order Paper.

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

**Point of Order  
Parliamentary Language**

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, there was an exchange during question period between my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the Minister of Labour, and in the course of his response the Minister of Labour referred to him as "that sneaky little member." The authorities I cite would be *Beauchesne* 485 and 486, Standing Order 23(j) in terms of abusive language.

The comment was regrettable. Although the word "sneaky" may not appear in *Beauchesne* or in the list you circulated pre commencement of session, the reality is that the words are to be viewed in their context. I think it's particularly regrettable that the Minister of Labour would use that kind of reference in referring to a member who has distinguished himself, since he joined this Assembly in 1997, with his forthrightness and his candour and the respect that he's brought to this Assembly.

I'd ask you, Mr. Speaker, to find that in these circumstances the adjective used was in fact demeaning and not appropriate in this Assembly.

Thank you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief. As the hon. member indicated, we need to look at the words that were used and at the context really. I can recall very specifically that the hon. Minister of Labour used them in a humorous fashion, I daresay almost as a term of endearment. Besides, the hon. Opposition House Leader is right: "sneaky" is not referenced in *Beauchesne*, "little" isn't referenced in *Beauchesne*, nor is any combination thereof referenced. It does not constitute unparliamentary language.

I don't believe the hon. minister meant it in a mean-spirited way. He was teasing the hon. member across the way and simply referring to the fact that he was quoting from a public document when he was trying to create the illusion that he had somehow secured some confidential information.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is one of those unique situations where the two participants in question have not offered an opinion or a view with respect to this matter. When we have spokespersons on behalf of both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar and the hon. Minister of Labour -- and that's certainly appropriate. House leaders may take that task.

One of the things that is very, very clear is that all the rules and the words that have been listed either dealing with the Assembly of the province of Alberta or *Beauchesne* do not reference the phrase in question: "sneaky." However, certainly, certainly, certainly we can all rise to a higher level than sometimes we do. Now, one knows that one can say that the hon. Minister of Labour was being facetious and there was an injection of humour. One knows, as well, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has certainly proven that he's very gifted on his feet, that he has an eloquence that provides a certain sense of humour with respect to the whole thing, and we do know that the Minister of Labour is reaching to find new

epithets of wisdom that he can throw across the floor from time to time. So considering that, neither of the two participants has offered a point with respect to this. That is certainly their right.

One would suggest, today being Thursday and today being Thursday afternoon, that the two hon. members in question sort of have this synergy between them that is quite unique. They tend to smile at one another. But overall, this House should find great displeasure with phraseology like "sneaky little member." Certainly this Speaker would not want to see it repeated.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: On a Standing Order 40 petition, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

**Calgary Teachers' Strike**

Mrs. MacBeth:

Be it resolved that this Assembly recognize the urgent need for a broad public debate on the imminent job action at the Calgary board of education resulting from this government's failure to adequately fund public education in Calgary to cover increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

MRS. MACBETH: Mr. Speaker, members will probably note that the words in this motion are those that repeat the words contained in the SOS petitions which we have been tabling in this Assembly, which now contain signatures of well over 10,000 Albertans who are concerned about the state of public education in this province.

I realize full well that under Standing Order 40 I must have a case of urgent and pressing necessity. I doubt that anyone and in fact I challenge anyone in this Assembly to identify anything as pressing and as urgent as the reality that a hundred thousand students in Calgary may be without a classroom to attend on Monday morning. Mr. Speaker, on Monday, of course, our schoolteachers will be in a position to go on a legal strike. As we speak to parents across the city of Calgary, as I have met with parents, and as we today talk, there are parents demonstrating in Calgary, there are people scrambling to make the necessary contingency plans for those 100,000 students of theirs, who will be adversely affected.

Mr. Speaker, the reason we need a broad public debate urgently on this issue is that this province is like a phantom player in the negotiations in Calgary. They are absent from the negotiation, yet if any party has done what it could do to undermine public education in this province, it is clearly the budget cutting without a plan that this province has engaged in.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the urgency. The Minister of Education mentioned it today. Our grade 12 students are of course facing extremely important exams for themselves that will be coming over the next couple of months, and it makes it particularly severe for them. While I was very pleased to hear the minister mention that the exams would carry on, the exams are not the only issue. The teaching of those students between now and when the exams occur is obviously a big issue.

This afternoon will be the very last opportunity that this Assembly has to head off this looming strike. One of the more disturbing tones in this House today is the fact that there's this passivity about accepting that a strike is imminent, yet we have four days between now and when that strike might occur, four days in which members in this Assembly can stand and discuss the issues of public education and the importance of public education.

As I noted in my question today: where is the Alberta advantage for these students who are facing the reality of a strike? Where is

the Alberta advantage for our school boards, which are being funded at \$500 less than they were five years ago and are being faced with the reality of having to lay off teachers in the largest classrooms in the province? Where is the Alberta advantage for parents, who have been fund-raising for basic necessities like literacy programs in our schools in Calgary, and where is the Alberta advantage for the teachers, fewer and fewer, as the reality of this government's cuts and its attempt to undervalue public education and underrate the impact of its cuts comes home?

Mr. Speaker, as I said at the outset, I can think of no more urgent, pressing matter for this Legislative Assembly to deal with than the matter of this looming strike, and I think it's high time that this Legislature stood unanimously and said: let's get to resolution in order that we can find the role for this province, an appropriate role, for the future of our students.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, as per the Standing Order 40 might we now have unanimous consent to proceed with the motion as proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition? Would all those in favour please say aye?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is defeated.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

**Bill 33**  
**Appropriation Act, 1999**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Provincial Treasurer I'd like to move third reading of Bill 33, the Appropriation Act, 1999.

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

MR. DICKSON: Yes. To speak to third reading on Bill 33. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. A few moments ago we heard I think a powerful presentation from the Leader of the Opposition about a specific issue having to do with education in the city of Calgary. You know, there is probably no more important element of the budget than that dealing with the Department of Education.

When I look around this Chamber this afternoon, I see a number of colleagues who also represent Calgary parents and Calgary schoolchildren. In fact, it causes me to think. If you have 100,000 students in the Calgary board of education system, how many families does that involve in the city of Calgary, how many parents and siblings and so on?

3:00

What we're talking about is this startling contrast between, on the one hand, the breakdown of support for public education in the city of Calgary, the biggest school district in this province, and at the very same time, a government that proposes, if you will, to dot the

"i" and cross the "t" on the 1999-2000 budget, a budget that clearly doesn't measure up. The timing of these two things -- dealing at third reading with the Appropriation Act while at the very same time in the city of Calgary we have this looming crisis in public education -- ought to cause every one of us to reflect that maybe, just maybe, hon. members, this appropriation bill doesn't do the job. Maybe, just maybe, that \$600 million, that we've heard about ad nauseam, which is being put back in over three years, may not be adequate. Maybe, just maybe, the fact that the funding going back into education is once again closeted in discrete envelopes takes away the flexibility of the school boards to spend that money the way they have been elected and mandated to spend it: addressing local needs.

You know, there are people in Calgary-Fish Creek and Calgary-Glenmore and Calgary-Currie who share some of the concerns that people in Calgary-*Buffalo* do. Yesterday, you know, I think I got something like 18 calls to my constituency office. My constituency administrator was in Edmonton yesterday.

MR. SMITH: She was up here. You introduced her.

MR. DICKSON: Exactly. But we have an answering machine. Modern technology affords the Calgary-*Buffalo* constituency office an answering machine. Now, Calgary-*Varsity* may still be using the blackboard and the chalk, but some of us have answering machines. So even when we're not in the office, constituents have an opportunity to register their concerns.

I'm saying to myself: if I got 18 phone calls yesterday from parents -- these weren't from ATA local executive members. These were from parents in Sunalta and Connaught and Scarboro and Lower Mount Royal. Some of them may have been from Upper Mount Royal in Calgary-Currie; I'm not sure. The point is that these people almost to a man or woman -- I haven't heard all the calls myself, but what's been relayed to me is that many of the calls were an identification that the root cause of the problem is inadequate funding from the province of Alberta.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

If we were to pass Bill 33 at third reading, what in effect we'd be doing is making a declaration that money is not the problem with the Calgary board of education. So then I started asking myself, because I know that we've got a lot of intelligent people in this Chamber -- we've got a former Minister of Education, former ATA executive member now in the person of the Minister of Health. I know he continues to be keenly interested. He's constantly advising his colleague the Minister of Education in terms of the pitfalls and the challenges in that difficult portfolio. I know he knows the truth of the challenge currently facing teachers and administrators. I make my observations, Madam Speaker. I hold no particular brief for teachers in the city of Calgary, and I hold no particular brief for the Calgary board of education, but I do hold a brief for the parents and the families who are going to be adversely affected if in fact there is a job action on Monday morning.

You know, there are grade 12 students who may have to experience what the Minister of Education experienced. It appears to have left some kind of a lasting impression on him, not so lasting that he's motivated to go to his Treasury Board or Treasury committee and press for additional funding but certainly enough, Madam Speaker.

MR. SMITH: You'd give away the money; wouldn't you? You'd give it away. Come on now. You'd give it away; wouldn't you?

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, you know, when I hear the

friendly interjection from the Minister of Labour, I'm reminded of how many times we've heard the Minister of Education -- wisely, less often than the Premier -- ask: how much is enough? The Premier does it on a constant basis. For those of us that had the privilege of attending the health summit, we remember Dr. Tom Noseworthy dealing with that question in the health care area: how much is enough? What Dr. Noseworthy said, and I know that the Tory MLAs who were present will remember this clearly as well, was: tell us what kind of a system you want. Tell us what kind of an education, or in his case, tell us what kind of a health care system you want. The same question applies here.

So when the Premier says that the question is, "How much is enough," I say, "No, no, Mr. Premier; the real question is: what kind of an education system do we want in this province?" Now, if the government believes, as they appear to on all of the evidence, that what we need is an emasculated public education system with continued additional support for private schools, then, you know, that \$600 million over three years may be plenty. In fact, if we're going to see a further dismantling of public education and the continued proliferation of private schools, independent schools, maybe we could get by by reducing that \$600 million over three years by 20 percent. There are some in this Assembly -- and I count myself proudly among them -- that believe that the answer is not more private schools, not more independent schools, that it's simply making an investment in the very excellent public education system we have.

You know, I think, Madam Speaker, that the difficulty faced in the city of Calgary is a real one. I remember when the Minister of Education was kind enough to share four hours with us one Friday morning about three weeks ago. Some of us had a chance to put questions to the Minister of Education in the designated subcommittee of supply. I specifically remember putting to the minister an analysis that had been done by SPEAK, Support Public Education - Act for Kids. These weren't economists. These aren't education economists. They're not PhD types in the Faculty of Education. They're homemakers, workers, professionals in the city of Calgary who had sat down and had taken the minister's budget announcement that promises \$600 million and said: well, let's go through and see how much of that is going to go to teachers' pensions and how much is going to go to independent schools and how much of it is going to go for other kinds of services and then how much is going into the classroom.

Madam Speaker, I apologize. I didn't think to bring with me that SPEAK analysis, but my best recollection is that these very interested parents went through, did the analysis. They started off with the amount that the minister said was going to be available for classrooms, and they discounted it by a number of different variables. What they came up with was, I believe -- and I know the Member for Calgary-Bow probably has the number right at her fingertips. I think it was something in the order of \$50 million. I think something in that order was in effect what they suggested might be net new money. I asked the Minister of Education on that day whether he had seen the analysis, whether he would be kind enough to review the analysis, and if he disagreed with that analysis, would he please tell me.

Well, I wasn't able to stay to the very end of that designated supply subcommittee meeting, but I heard some of the minister's responses. I read the *Hansard* transcripts from that committee meeting. What was interesting to me was that I did not hear or see the minister take serious issue with the analysis done by the SPEAK group.

There's a notion in law, which the Minister of Education is well aware of, called estoppel. It says that if one represents or holds out

a set of circumstances, you can't at a later point, after people have acted on those representations, in this case acquiescence to their prejudice . . .

3:10

MR. MAR: You also cannot foist something. This is foisting.

MR. DICKSON: This is, admittedly, a bit of an adaptation of the equitable principle.

But it seemed to me that the minister had the opportunity, if he disagreed with what the SPEAK group had done in terms of analysis, to tell me that the analysis was all wet. He chose not to do that. Now, he may have had some other reasons, Madam Speaker, for not doing it. He may have been courteous and kind. He may have thought it not a suitably rigorous analysis. He may have thought it was inaccurate. He may have wanted to be kind to the volunteers that prepared it. I don't know what his motivation was, and I don't think in this Chamber we should cast into question the motivation of members. We have to take the words that were spoken at the time.

What I came away with was that these parents with SPEAK, these people with the school councils in the city of Calgary, did a pretty darn effective job of determining how few new net dollars were coming into the Calgary system. After you discount for the huge population growth we've seen and discount for other things, what you find in fact is that there isn't nearly the moneys going into the Calgary system that had been promised.

I wonder, Madam Speaker. I need some advice from colleagues in the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Sit down.

MR. DICKSON: No, Madam Speaker. I need some substantive advice. I was looking for new advice. I hear that all the time. I thought we might hear something specific.

I'm going back to Calgary in a few minutes. I'm going to be meeting with school councils, and I wanted to give colleagues on the other side of the House an opportunity to give me some advice that I can share, on a serious note, with school councils and parents who are absolutely concerned with what may happen Monday morning. I thought I might have got some good advice in question period. I sat and I listened to every one of those questions and, discouragingly, to every one of the responses. You know something? I'm no wiser now than before the commencement of question period. We had an opportunity for a Standing Order 40 debate, and I thought that that might have provided the opportunity for members in the government caucus to give me some advice I could share with school councils. That opportunity was foreclosed as well.

Madam Speaker, I guess I'm going to have to go back and talk to those school councils and share with them the good information I've received from my colleague the Education critic. I'm going to have to be able to report that we tried this afternoon to have a debate in this Assembly on an urgent basis about school funding and that there was not unanimous consent. In fact, most of the Calgary MLAs that I noticed voted against it.

I'm going to have to go back and reluctantly report that the government caucus is being bamboozled by the promises of the \$600 million and that people have not been listening to school councils, that they have not been listening to school parents. That's just a really regretful circumstance.

DR. WEST: Point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

**Point of Order  
Relevance**

DR. WEST: I'd like your understanding for the Assembly on relevancy, on where the member is going here. He's debating the Standing Order 40 that was defeated in this Assembly and working it into the Appropriation Act. That's not right, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, go ahead on the point of order.

MR. DICKSON: It's good advice from the Minister of Energy. I certainly had not intended that, and if it sounded in any way like I was trying to reopen that question on the Standing Order 40, that had not been my intention at all. I simply reflected and made an observation on a fact and something that happened here a moment ago which is part of the history of the Assembly. Those are my comments on the point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Well, the point of order I think is well taken. The chair actually did get out the appropriate bill here, and it is the Appropriation Act, 1999, Bill 33. Basically, appropriation acts deal with dollars and cents, and there is an allocation in here for Education. I would ask if we can try through the remainder of the debate on this bill in this reading to stick to the relevancy issue, to deal with the dollar amounts in this Appropriation Act.

**Debate Continued**

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, it's clear I have been spectacularly unsuccessful yet again in trying to make the linkage between what's happening in schools in the Calgary public system and what's happening with Bill 33. So I'm going to yield the floor to members who may be more persuasive, who may be able to marshal stronger arguments to be able to cause this government monolith to hesitate and to reconsider about an issue that probably means more to the future of this province, more to the economic future, more to the social future of this province than any other issue that we deal with in the course of our time in this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to move that we adjourn debate on Bill 33.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Having heard the motion by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader, does the Assembly agree with the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's carried.

head: Private Bills

head: Third Reading

**Bill Pr. 1**

**National Bond Insurance Corporation Act**

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, the National Bond Insurance Corporation Act.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I want to raise a couple of general concerns at this stage of the bill. It's destined to pass in this Assembly at some point.

You know, there has been a theme that's been identified by the Official Opposition over the years as these insurance bills have come forward through Private Bills Committee, and that theme has to do with this government's propensity to create opportunities for the erosion of our public health care system through creating new markets for private insurance. While I cannot put myself into the mind of the proponents of the particular private bill that's before the Assembly today, certainly I've had the experience of listening and reacting to the provincial government. I think that some of these enterprises that are in the insurance industry are doing what I would expect them to do, and that is to seek out potential new markets and prepare themselves for commercial opportunities that may arise.

I'm just increasingly concerned and frustrated that as these bills make their way to the Assembly and eventually through the Assembly, we are not paying enough attention to the larger trend and the one that's been put into place by a government that has demonstrated time and time and time again that it really would much rather prepare a road map to the privatization of health care than throw up any meaningful barriers. Of course, we've seen that evidence in so many ways, including this government's rather tortured explanations for what has become the now infamous Bill 37. So, Madam Speaker, the difficulty I have is not necessarily on the merits of this private petition but really is on how it relates to what I see as a long-standing government commitment to perhaps corporate friends that they will open the doors to increased privatization in our health care system.

3:20

Now, the other factor that reinforces that concern in my mind is the public bill that's before us right now, and that is Bill 25, the Insurance Act, which would eliminate the role of the Standing Committee on Private Bills in terms of vetting Insurance Act initiatives. The combination of the two: this government's push towards privatization and the elimination of this mandatory review by a standing committee of the Legislature, one of the few standing committees of the Legislature that actually meets and works, unlike the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. This government every day creates a new record in terms of being the jurisdiction with the longest lapse between the last time that committee met and any potential time in the future that it might, if this government ever allows that committee to be convened to review the regulations that flow from legislation.

Parenthetically I'll add, Madam Speaker, that had this government taken the advice of the official Liberal opposition and called that committee to convene, we may have been able to save them from some considerable expense and embarrassment by reviewing some of the regulations which led to the creation of some 800 either new or increased user fees. Of course, with all of these new and increased user fees, we're now in the position where we've got the Premier and the Treasurer arguing with one another over whether these fees should stay or go, which ones are taxes, which ones aren't taxes, how they have been arrived at.

In fact, Madam Speaker, interestingly the Premier said just yesterday that he didn't really know. He could just assume that the

fees would be fair, but he didn't really know. Of course, I would have thought that the government would have made it their business to do a cost analysis before they forced Albertans to pay these fees, but that apparently wasn't the case. Referring those kinds of regulations to the committee might have prevented the government from this particular embarrassment and this spat that the Treasurer and the Premier are having right now.

To the main point on the private bill. As I was saying, the government has now made it clear that they have a certain amount of contempt for the standing committee, because they are removing or would hope to remove part of its mandate and responsibility through the passage of Bill 25. As I said at the outset, it's apparent to me that this private bill has wound its way through the Chamber and will eventually receive majority support. But it does speak to these broader issues, and I don't believe enough attention has been paid to them by all members of this Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert to close debate?

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

**Bill Pr. 3**  
**Consumers Insurance Company Act**

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

MS GRAHAM: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre I now would like to move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, Consumers Insurance Company Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a third time]

head: Government Bills and Orders  
head: Second Reading

**Bill 24**  
**Traffic Safety Act**

[Adjourned debate April 12: Mr. Yankowsky]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the ND opposition.

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll just make a few comments about this bill. While I support the contents of it, I must say and need to put on the record my objection to some things that are absent in this bill.

First of all, I listened to the minister making his observations and justifications about why the bill doesn't make it illegal to ride in the back of trucks, but I don't accept those arguments, period. In fact, I would like to observe that when I see dogs in the back of trucks, I get very upset. I mean, if a collision occurs, whoever, whether it's a human being or a four-legged creature, can be hurtled like a projectile into traffic. Upon any kind of incident or collision, even just being pushed around inside the back of the truck, let alone into traffic, could cause serious damage to the person or the four-legged creature. I realize that on farms one needs to make exemptions, but I say: let the local authorities decide if on occasion a person riding in the back of the truck is considered necessary or just foolishness. If it's foolishness, then subject the person to an offence and a fine.

The other observation I have is with respect to the use of helmets when riding a bicycle. I have long been an advocate of a province-wide endorsement of this procedure via legislation.

I have in front of me a document from an organization called Safe Kids. I take it that it's a letter jointly sponsored by the Stollery

Children's Health Centre in Edmonton and the Alberta Children's hospital in Calgary. I'll give a quote, and I'll hand this over to *Hansard* as well, because I'll be done with the issue by then. They point out in the letter:

Bicycle helmet legislation also saves costs to the health care budget. In Canada (1995-96) the economic costs resulting from pedal cycle injury was \$195,756,237.00. In Alberta, the lifetime care costs for one severe bicycle related brain injury are \$2.5 million or more. It seems contradictory, at a time when our province has struggled with the burden of health care costs, that we have yet to enact legislation that will reduce costs over the long term.

Safe Kids - Children's Safety survey demonstrates that 77% of Alberta's parents support bicycle helmet legislation.

Boy, can you ever tell when I'm not reading from my own notes. I just don't relate to other people's syntax.

They go on to make the argument that we should do everything we can "to increase helmet use and decrease bicycling related head injury." I know that the minister said: well, it's up to the municipalities. But I'll tell you what's happened so far in Edmonton. Madam Speaker, I canvassed a number of city councillors. You know what? They're scared of it. They all say: oh, yeah, I personally support creating a bylaw to enforce the use of wearing a helmet when riding a bicycle. But they think that it's going to turn into a political nightmare like the perennial debate on city council about whether or not we should have a cat bylaw. Okay? I for one would support a cat bylaw. I would put my political life on the line for one. But I would also put my political life on the line for a requirement to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle. To me this is common sense, and I fear that no municipality will undertake to create and enforce municipal bylaws to require citizens to do the safe thing.

I suggest to you that when you've got those nice small helmets on in comparison to those enormous globes that motorcyclists have to wear, I think the case is made pretty obvious. I live in the river valley, have done so for, oh, 18 years at least. Shortly after I moved into my place on 93rd Street -- and that's quite a bit away, about one and a half, two blocks off the walking/cycling path -- this woman came to my door in a panic. She said: help, help, my husband has fallen off his bicycle, and his head is bleeding. I said: "Of course I'll help. Let's call 911." So I called 911. In the meantime, you know, while I'm on the phone, she's saying: we need to get some cloths or towels over to him. I said: yeah, okay; let's go.

So on the way over I had time to ask her why it was that she came all the way to my place, for heaven's sake. She told me that she'd stopped on Cameron, that she'd stopped on 100th, that she'd stopped on 94th, and she couldn't find anybody at home. So she had come a clear two blocks to find a human being that would actually open the door for her to help her and her husband out. Well, I got over to the location where her husband had fallen and looked at this guy, and I was quite horrified. He was bleeding very profusely, my dear. I know nothing about health care, and all we could do was kind of fake it until the ambulance got there, which they did within a matter of another couple of minutes.

3:30

Every Sunday I take a really long walk through the river valley. In the area where I go, if you go halfway along on the route that I take every Sunday, you would be half an hour's walk away from an ambulance. If you fell in one of those long stretches, I have often wondered how an ambulance would get there anyway. So I will conclude with that anecdote. I realize one never goes from the specific to the general, as a matter of logic, and I'm not attempting to do that. It's just that I personally had this experience, and it drummed home to me -- and that's close to 10 years ago -- the need for persons on bicycles to be wearing helmets.

Actually I do have one more thought, Madam Speaker, and that is that if in a year after this bill passes we don't have municipalities enacting bylaws to enforce the use of wearing helmets while on bicycles, I hope the hon. minister would agree to revisit this bill and incorporate it into provincial legislation.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on Bill 24, the Traffic Safety Act. In fact, first of all, there'll be some compliments due here. This minister has gone way out of his way to include citizens of Alberta in the writing of this bill, in the drafting of this bill and has in fact done a good job. They are putting four acts together, which in and of itself is an admirable end in that it makes the enforcement of any traffic safety much easier. All concerned, both the enforcer and the general public, now have one piece of legislation to which to refer, have one set of rules to follow, and therefore are able to understand it.

It's also a pleasure to know that this particular minister has afforded the opposition the opportunity to debate in private some of these items and to understand from where the department is coming and how the drafts were put together and how this bill ended up as it is. I understand that two members of this caucus and a staffer spent some time reviewing the bill with the minister and his staff and easing this particular bill through the Legislature without a great deal of rancour. Some of us were in this Assembly last evening and understood how legislation is brought forward without letting the opposition know what is contained therein. It makes it very difficult for the opposition to argue either for or against. This particular minister did the right thing and brought the citizenry, the public agencies that enforce these acts, as well as the opposition and the public all along together to understand what this act is about and how it shall be enforced.

There is room, of course, and always is room for debate for some items contained in the legislation. This member has some different views as to the legislation as it's put forward here. In particular, I'll pick up on the member that is in fact the leader of the ND opposition and her opposition to not having the riding in pickup trucks included in a piece of legislation.

I believe, as most believe, that seat belts in fact are a very good thing, and the enforcement of that has saved a great deal of lives in this province, saved a great deal of personal injury and injury to families as a whole. Now, I don't understand how we cannot think of the rancour that went on in this Chamber in earlier years in bringing that piece of legislation to the House and having it passed, with some great deal of difficulty as I understand. Instantly it was accepted, as a general rule. There are still a number of people, including my father-in-law, who still think that the right way to wear a seat belt is to hook it over their arm so that the police officer can see that there's something there. He doesn't believe in the act at all, but it's difficult to convince someone over 80 that he has gotten to that state by making as many errors as I think he has made. So I have not made a great dent in his life insofar as changing him to believe the rules.

Nonetheless, he's just one of very few. Most of us accept the fact that seat belts save lives, and they save a great deal of money also in the repair of those bodies that are thrown about inside and out of cars. Now, how can we justify that with enabling people to ride in the backs of half-tons, which is in the same platform as a great deal of our automobiles, vans, and the like? We force people sitting inside a cabin, in a chair, to wear a seat belt, yet you're allowed to ride around in the back of a half-ton.

I have a comment from one member that spends a lot of her time on a horse, that doesn't have a seat belt, that she wants to get rid of seat belts. Well, perhaps that is her opinion, but it is generally accepted in this society that seat belts are a reasonable precaution against injury. Likewise, some would argue -- and some would say rightly so -- that riding a motorcycle requires a helmet. By law it requires a helmet. Well, you're no further open to the elements and free to fly in the air off the back of a motorcycle than you are out in the back of a half-ton. As a matter of fact, in the back of a half-ton you have absolutely no control. You can't see or feel what is about to transpire. You're probably much more endangered, and it is not herein contained.

Now, I've heard the minister before, and I know that he's listened to both sides of the argument. Quite frankly, I don't know where he personally stands on the matter, but he's a representative of the government and must take that position. He has said that it will be put into regulations. Well, if it's good enough for a regulation, then certainly it's good enough to debate in the form of an act and to put into the act. As I said earlier, one of the important parts of this act is that it has done away with four acts, putting them all together so that one can read the regulations in the province of Alberta and understand what is expected in the way of being lawful. But I don't see it here. Now, I haven't heard the minister or in fact members of the government bench explain why it is not, explain the rationale why it's not contained here. Quite frankly, I'd like to hear that before third reading comes about on this bill.

3:40

Likewise, there's another area that concerns me somewhat: the administrative suspensions that are included in this act. It does seem to me that one of the concerns I have with the immediate administrative suspension on the spot is that guilt is proven right on the spot. Now, I don't have any difficulty with a temporary, overnight suspension, which currently is the law of the land. Refusing to blow into a breathalyzer does not constitute guilt unto itself. In fact, there are a number of cases, I'm told, where there is a valid reason for not blowing in the little machine, and under this act we would think that is guilt.

I've spoken to a number of police officers on the enforcement of this act, and having spent some time on the Police Commission, I understand that there are two schools of thought here. The one that seems to have won out, judging by the application of this act, is that police officers are trained to discern guilt and therefore can dispense it. Well, the last time I looked, a six-month course in policing does not really qualify one to administer the law as this act does, and certainly it shall be challenged in the courts. I suppose we shall have to wait and see how the courts do in fact interpret the enforceability of this act versus an individual's personal rights to life and liberty.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: It's already been challenged six times.

MR. WHITE: Oh, I'm informed that it's been challenged six times. In other provinces I presume. And the similar wording has actually been enforced?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yeah. In every case it's been upheld.

MR. WHITE: Well, it's been upheld in every case, the minister informs me. So that would say to me that it has been drafted well, which is good, but whether it in fact is an imposition we want to place on our . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister.



**Point of Order  
Questioning a Member**

DR. WEST: Would the member entertain a question in debate?

MR. WHITE: I have a bit of a problem when the member opposite wants to ask me questions when that man has yet to answer one single question I have ever put to him. I have difficulty with that.

Madam Speaker, in speaking on the point of order further, today I had to provide him after the fact with the information from his department on his web site to answer the question that I asked, and he didn't answer it still. So I don't know. What part of question and answer is the man missing? I fail to understand.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair would take that as a no, hon. member.

MR. WHITE: Very perceptive, Madam Speaker. You're just really quick. [interjection] It's a "maybe" for another day, I'm informed by a member on this side.

**Debate Continued**

MR. WHITE: There's another area that is open for debate here that is not contained in this act and that perhaps should be. However, these remarks come from an urban member and not a rural member of the province. I would like to think bicycle helmets are debated much more fully in this House. Whether you're riding in the country or you're doing some backcountry riding on one of the modern bicycles with suspensions, you'll see that those that ride on a regular basis always do wear a helmet. I mean, it's a matter of course. They understand. They've come off their bicycles enough times to know that not only does the head come down a little faster than it should, but getting an arm out to stop it doesn't always save a damaged skull.

Now, I would think that as the advent of seat belts has been brought along, it was slow in coming. It took a long time to convince a great deal of people that it was a reasonable thing to do to protect themselves and to protect society. Well, I would have thought that the introduction of helmets, at least for those that are under 18, to enforce that while they grow up -- yes, you might not for the first few years be able to fully enforce the act. In fact, it would be darn difficult to enforce it. But over time children would come to know that when riding a bicycle, part of a bicycle's equipment is in fact a helmet. It would progress, and by the time we're well into the next century, those children coming up and becoming adults would in fact feel naked on a bicycle without a helmet.

I know that a good friend of mine rides probably 5,000 kilometres a year, and he can't get close to a bicycle without one of three helmets that he has, depending on the weather conditions, because he cannot feel right about riding without one. He has survived many a crash, and at least two of them were serious enough that he thinks he could have sustained damage to his skull had he not been wearing one. Now, I don't ride a bicycle that much myself anymore, but I'm getting to the point now where a helmet even for me is becoming a standard piece of apparel. When I grew up, of course, we didn't know what a helmet was, although we did know what an injury was, having sustained a number of them myself.

The remainder of the act and the depth which the minister has gone through and analyzed various parts of it is quite impressive, and I'm quite impressed with the initiation of the discussion of graduated licences. As a father of two driving-aged teenagers, one 16 and one 17, I'm painfully aware of the lack of experience. Now, how one graduates a licence, whether it be on the basis of allowing drivers to have a graduated testing of a licence . . .

DR. WEST: We were thinking more of your age group.

MR. WHITE: Madam Speaker, it seems to me that there is probably a lot of room in this Legislature for one member or another to rise in their place and to enter debate. I would think that one that has so much to say so often might put it all together, may be able to put it all together and be able to say it in seven to 10 minutes perhaps or maybe even expand to a full 20. But it doesn't seem to be the case. It seems to be that these interjections from points west are coming in all the time. Oh, sorry; we're actually facing east. Unfortunately it's so.

MR. SAPERS: But then you wouldn't get the pun.

MR. WHITE: That's right. It would be a totally punless statement had it been made the other way around.

Madam Speaker, I'm doing the best one can to speak to the bill here. The member that so rudely interrupted me while I was speaking might have known that I was complimenting the minister on putting forward this part of the bill at least for discussion, if he can't get it put into law as yet or if he thinks there are other ways of doing it.

There certainly was a great deal of discussion around high schools, my son's high school in particular, and it was not all negative. They in fact are responsible enough to know that they don't have all the skills to operate a motor vehicle totally and completely unfettered the day that they turn 16 and can pass an examination that is in two parts. One is a simple driving test, and the other is 20 questions on the rules of the road. Any one of them that can get past grade 9 can spend two hours studying and pass that part of an examination. That gives you an operator's licence, but it doesn't give you licence to go out and put people's lives in danger and your own in particular, and the students know that. They're quite aware that driving is a dangerous activity and that it does take a certain amount of experience to attain a level where you in fact are competent.

Now, the difficulty is -- and the minister knows it well -- that an urban-born teenager and one that is born and lives on a farm are totally different. A young fellow that becomes 13 on a farm knows how to get the half-ton from the barn to the front of the house and moves equipment and vehicles around all of the time and becomes quite competent at driving at a very, very early age. So in fact that person at 16 could be a very, very competent driver and, depending on personality traits, be equal to a driver much, much more experienced in years on the road than certainly that person would be.

3:50

The act is going to have to be quite specific as to the driving rules, that a full, unfettered operator's licence is given to a new driver on the basis of competence. That would be doing graduated testing, but of course that would cost a lot of money, which this government doesn't want to part with, or it's simply put down as a matter of years that a person has been on this Earth. I would like to think we could be a little more creative than that, but this act doesn't seem to provide for that, although it certainly has opened the debate for some further consideration of graduated licensing.

Briefly in closing, Madam Speaker, I'm happy to support this bill, although with reservations in those three areas that I have outlined, and I shall take my place and wait for further debate.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I've certainly enjoyed listening to the debate so far on Bill 24 and wanted to make a few comments myself and thank the minister for his usual gentlemanly co-operation with the opposition as he's bringing forward legislation.

There are a few comments and concerns that I have, and I'll try to keep my comments brief. Administrative licence suspension is very controversial, and I must admit that I am still listening very closely to input I am receiving from my constituents on this matter. I've made it a habit over the last few weeks to put into conversation this whole notion of administrative suspension. On the one hand, I don't think we can ever do enough when it comes to enforcing the law about drinking and driving. I don't think we can ever too often repeat the need to educate people about the dangers and then put our money where our mouth is and make sure that we're doing everything we can to stop the carnage that comes from the deadly combination of alcohol and motor vehicles.

That being said, the police are being put in a very difficult position, and I'm not sure it's one that they've asked for or one that they're in some respects adequate to assume. That's got nothing to do with the professionalism of our police forces and our police personnel in this province, and it has nothing to do with their ability to make quality judgments under difficult circumstances, but it has everything to do with the role they play within the overall context of the criminal justice system. The police are not there to be agents of political will, and the police are not there to be judge and jury. The police are there to investigate crime and to enforce the law and then to provide to other players in the system the evidence needed to proceed with charges, to proceed with prosecution, and if the facts warrant it to proceed to a conviction and then ultimately a sentence or a consequence.

I really am of two minds on this issue and need to hear more from not just the constituents of Edmonton-Glenora, but I am hopeful that we are going to be receiving some input from all members of this Assembly on what they're hearing in their hometowns as well. This is a significant, significant move that has everything to do with safety, with perceptions of safety, with the police, with the perception of the role and the powers of the police. It has to do with our rights guaranteed under the Charter. It has to do with the separation of the various components of our political and justice systems, and I don't think we should enter into this change lightly or easily.

I have less concerns about graduated licensing. In fact I think it's a pretty good idea. Now, I say this having had a discussion briefly with my children, who are rapidly approaching the age where they will be getting their learners' licences, and they didn't think it was such a great idea. They said, "Well, dad, did you have these restrictions when you were learning how to drive?" I said, "Well, no, but I was a very responsible kid." They said, "Well, dad, do you think that we're not responsible kids?" I said: "No. Your mother is doing a wonderful job. I think you are responsible kids, but it's a different time. There'll be more pressure on you than I had. I lived in a kinder, simpler, gentler time." They said, "Well, dad, but didn't you used to drag race?" I said, "Well, yeah, I did, but I was only on a course, only when we went out to the drag strip." They said, "But, dad, what about that whole album you had of all of those pictures?" I said, "Well, yeah, but those -- go talk to your mother."

The fact is that for a long time we've been struggling with ways, legal and fair ways, to help ease young people into safe driving and safe driving habits. I know from my own experience and in dealing with the young people in my community and particularly with my own children that, all joking aside, it is a different time. I think it may be a very responsible act, as I say, to ease young people into the responsibility that comes with having a driver's licence and being in

command and control of all that horsepower and all that metal.

I also have some comments that I'd like to make about the question of bicycle helmets. My same very responsible children, Madam Speaker, that I was just speaking of, will not let me on my bicycle without wearing a helmet. When I had my first two-wheeler, we didn't have helmets. Nobody had a helmet, and the suggestion or the thought of a helmet never even came to mind. Maybe it should have, but it didn't, yet there has been absolutely a social change.

MR. SEVERTSON: That's what happened to you, Howard.

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake says, "That's what happened to you." Well, member, it's true. I did fall off my bike onto my head more than once, but of course we had a health care system that I could count on in those days. We still have a health care system that's populated by exceptional men and women doing everything they can in difficult circumstances.

Madam Speaker, the fact is that there has been a social change. Much as there has been social change about the mixture of alcohol and driving, there's been a social change about the use of bicycle helmets. My kids have helmets. They will not ride their bikes without them, and their mother and I don't have to remind them. It's as natural to them as putting on their shoes before they go outside to get on their bikes, just like they won't sit in the car and drive around without being in their seat belts. Some of those education programs I guess have worked, and the peer pressure, the social pressure is having an impact.

4:00

With all that in mind, you could argue that we don't need to legislate that kind of behaviour because in fact it's already happening. But there is a public policy issue here, and it has everything to do not with regulating people's personal choices but with the cost of not wearing a helmet. With all of the debate we have about health care expenses, it just seems to me that we should be in this Assembly exploring ways that are defensible, that may restrict a personal choice but serve a greater good, where the greater public interest outstrips, outweighs that erosion of personal freedom that might come about as a result of the law. We've done that with seat belts. We've done that with all kinds of motor vehicle regulations. We're not free to choose which side of the road we drive on. So it seems to me that there may be some merit.

I guess I would have hoped that the government would have been a little more bold in this regard and would not have left this item to regulation, because regulations really are subject to whim. They're hardly ever seen, the debate, in public. It would have been easier for me to understand the decision of the government had they taken a clear position, had they said: we will not legislate bicycle helmets, or we will legislate bicycle helmets for children, or we will make bicycle helmets mandatory for bicycle riders on public streets and highways. It seems to me it would have been easier for me to understand and to come to terms with the decision. But doing it this way really doesn't demonstrate much of anything except the political sensitivity to the whole situation.

I would be willing to stand in this Assembly and debate a strong decision from government if we had one, but we don't. We're left with this notion that it'll be left to regulation, and that's unfortunate. I would hope that regardless of what politically flows from this legislation, Albertans will be encouraged to bicycle safely and to wear the appropriate protective equipment.

I feel the same way, frankly, about the question of riding in pickup trucks. If we're going to have mandatory seat belt laws, it seems to

me counterintuitive to say: well, we won't do anything about riding in the back of a pickup truck. If you're inside the cab of the pickup truck and you're driving down the highway, you must have your seat belt on, but if you're in the back of the pickup truck, you don't even have to be in a seat. It just makes me wonder, again, what the thinking is. I'm sure there are enough good minds and good heads in this Assembly that we could craft the right kinds of exemptions if we felt that we needed them for certain members of our community.

Again, I just would have much preferred to see a strong position taken by government instead of this bit of a waffle, frankly, is how I see it.

MRS. SLOAN: A waffle?

MR. SAPERS: Yeah. A bit of a waffle.

The question of helmets and infringing on personal choice and seat belts and riding in pickup trucks reminds me of a circumstance that I was unfortunately involved with right after being elected to this Assembly back in 1993. As I remember it, there was a tragic incident during a chuckwagon race where one of the drivers was killed. It was on the eve of the Calgary Stampede, and the *Calgary Sun* phoned me up to ask my opinion on whether I thought chuckwagon riders and drivers and rodeo participants should wear helmets.

I said: "Well, I think they should wear helmets if they want to wear helmets. I'm sure that they have an association and that association is responsible for dealing with standards and safety issues. If there was a concern around that, they would bring that concern to the association, and if new safety rules were required, they would put them into place." The reporter for the *Sun* said, "Okay; but given that it was up to you, would you think they should wear helmets?" I said: "Well, it's not up to me, and I really don't have enough knowledge, I don't have enough expertise to know whether it would be a good or a bad idea. But I do know that it's a very dangerous sport, that it's a very high-risk activity, and I think it's important that people take whatever precautions they can when they're involved in such a high-risk or dangerous activity."

Well, wouldn't you know it, Madam Speaker. The next day there was a headline, a story in the local paper. There was even an editorial written about this loony, urban Liberal suggesting that rodeo cowboys wear flak jackets and helmets.

DR. TAYLOR: Surely they didn't mean you, Howard.

MR. SAPERS: Well, Madam Minister of science, research, and information technology, they did.

DR. TAYLOR: Madam Minister?

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker. Well, if you can correct his mistake, you can certainly correct mine.

They did indeed. It really heightened my awareness of just how deeply Albertans feel about these personal choices and this freedom to choose. I was not suggesting for a minute that this Legislature should interfere in the tradition and the history and the heritage of rodeo. I only retell the story because, as I say, it makes me very mindful of the fact that you don't mess with those freedoms of Albertans lightly.

Of course, this has a link back to the earlier discussion about these roadside administrative suspensions. On the one hand we have the government saying: we will make a judgment about a social good, we will make a judgment about the public good, and we will say that we will allow for this infringement of right because it serves a

greater interest, but on the other hand we're not going to take a position on things like bicycle helmets and riding in the back of pickup trucks. I see the contrast, and I just wonder if the government sees the hint of a contradiction in how Bill 24 has come before us.

Now, there's one other thing that I'd like to talk about before I take my seat. A friend of my daughter's was injured in a really horrific accident that involved a large flatbed trailer truck and her riding her bicycle home from school. It was one of these trailers that was empty. It was steel gray in colour, and the cab of the truck was white. It was sort of an overcast afternoon as this young girl was riding her bicycle home. As she was crossing the road on her bicycle, she noticed the truck coming, judged that she had enough time between the truck and the next vehicle behind it to cross the road, but what she failed to see and what failed to register was the fact that the truck was towing this nearly 40-foot long flatbed trailer. So as she crossed the road, she hit the trailer right in front of the rear wheels.

She was dragged under the dual set of rear wheels, and in fact she had bruising which mirrored the tire treads of the truck from her shoulder, across her chest and abdomen, down her thigh and ending at her knee. Her bike, of course, was smashed to bits. In fact, when the police came to the scene and they came across her lying on the road, they immediately called in for a coroner. They were concerned that the injuries were so significant that they would be dealing with a fatality.

The good news, Madam Speaker, is that this remarkable young woman has made a full recovery from her injuries, and she was significantly hurt, as you can imagine. But with the resilience of youth and all that, she's doing just fine. She's a very bright and talented young woman indeed.

4:10

The issue here was that the trailer didn't have any side markings at all. I did a little bit of investigation and actually had some co-operation from the minister's department on this. There have been many accidents in North America involving empty flatbed trailers. There has been a move to putting reflective markings on the side of these trailers to increase their visibility. I'm hopeful that Alberta will be on board. In fact, it's been indicated to me that Alberta will be on board in terms of meeting what may be a new North American standard of marking these kinds of trailers so that these kinds of accidents can be avoided, if not prevented altogether. It may be too much to hope that they'd be prevented altogether, but the markings would sure go a long way.

While this government is in a regulation-making mood when it comes to traffic safety, I would certainly encourage the minister to, as quickly as he can, ensure that all of the regulations necessary are in place that would see these kinds of reflective markings put onto these kinds of trailers so that we don't have to hear another story such as the one involving my daughter's young friend.

Now, the Traffic Safety Act has been a long time coming. There's been lots of consultation. The grouping together of the laws and the regulations dealing with traffic safety under one provincial statute is a great idea whose time has long since passed, so I'm happy to see it. I do look forward to some debate in committee about the issues that I've raised as they relate to probationary licences, helmets, seat belt use, pickup use, and of course roadside suspensions.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to

get involved in the debate this afternoon on Bill 24. This is another extensive piece of legislation for this province. I, too, would like to add my congratulations to the minister and the officials in his department for bringing forward this update. The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky we all know works very hard, and as I understand from reading the brief, there was a very wide consultation process in the drafting of not only this bill but the previous edition of it.

You always, Madam Speaker, learn something new every day. The only thing I can say is that if the province's highways would age as well as this particular minister, then there would not be the need in this province for extensive highway rehabilitation. He's a remarkable man, and he is celebrating a significant birthday, and I wish him and his family well.

Bill 24. After all this consultation, we are going to combine four acts relating to traffic and highways. Every one of us has read in the papers and on the evening news have seen the discussions about the administrative licence suspensions for impaired driving or refusing to take a breath or blood test that can result in either a three-month or six-month suspension and the introduction of graduated licensing for learner or probationary drivers, including zero tolerance for alcohol.

At this time last week students from all across the province were assembling here for Mr. Speaker's first Alberta Youth Parliament. I had the pleasure of the student -- actually, there were two -- who was representing Edmonton-Gold Bar following me, shadowing me, on Tuesday, and of all the bills that we were discussing, this was the bill she had the most interest in. She read with a great deal of interest our bill brief, which was ably put together by our research staff, and she started to talk about this idea of graduated licensing. A little later in my remarks I'm going to share with you some of her concerns.

We're also with this legislation going to allow a review of driving records. This is not without controversy, but with the accident rates and the intense volume of traffic on Alberta's major roads this is something that I think we need to look at. Every hon. member has heard the debate about the wearing of cycle helmets or riding in the back of pickup trucks, and I understand this will be dealt with in the regulations, according to the department.

I believe another highlight of the bill, Madam Speaker, would be the regulations enabling municipalities the use of helmets -- and I understand this is going to be a decision that's going to be left up to the municipalities across the province -- and the maximum speeds for snowmobiles. We don't think about putting a speed limit on snowmobiles, but with some of the engines that one can buy in the model of snowmobile of your choice, I'm told that the horsepower created can be greater than that of a minivan for instance. A significant amount of speed can be generated with a snowmobile, and not a winter goes by where there's not one or two Albertans that are fatally injured on snowmobiles. This, too, is a good initiative by the minister. I can understand that other members of the government may be a little bit reluctant, but this is good legislation, and I support the minister on this.

We need to talk a little bit about the public input and the public meetings that were held across the province last summer. These meetings were well organized, and there was ample opportunity for members of the public to raise their concerns. It's not like other departments where there are decisions made and then there are discussion papers. This was a public consultation. It worked, and I think we have a satisfactory piece of legislation here.

Now, Bill 50, the Traffic Safety Act, was tabled in the Legislature in the fall of 1998, and this also allowed for more public consultation and more public comment. However, Madam Speaker, there was no

formal process for this, and maybe that was a good thing. But lobby groups have continued their work with respect to riding in the back of pickup trucks and the concept of wearing bicycle helmets. Some municipalities have complained, however, that they did not want these issues left to municipal discretion as enforcement would be another form of downloading.

Now, I don't think this is the opportune time for me to discuss downloading, because it is a sensitive subject for some hon. members across the way, so I will continue with my discussion on Bill 24 and how with the previous Bill 50 there were subtle changes as a result of this excellent consultation that went on.

4:20

The main changes in Bill 24 as compared to Bill 50, Madam Speaker, are with respect to bicycle helmets and pickup trucks. On April 8 the officials from the ministry of transportation were still undecided whether to go with mandatory bike helmets, and we will see what develops there. I asked, for my own information, in the coffee shop: how do you feel about this proposal? I got a curt reply back: if hockey players have to wear helmets, then bicycle riders should too. I thought: fine; that is one way of looking at it.

But we also have to look at the idea of administrative suspensions. The 21-day temporary licence will be issued. It was originally proposed to have a seven-day licence, and I will talk about that now. But under, I believe, section 88 of the new legislation, if a peace officer believes that a person has committed an alcohol-related offence, they may withhold the driver's licence and issue a 21-day temporary permit. The person can be suspended for three months or six months if an alcohol-related accident has led to injury or death.

Now, we have to understand that the blood alcohol concentration rate will be .08, and refusal to give a sample of breath or blood without a reasonable cause cannot be overlooked. The penalty, Madam Speaker, is the three-month suspension, and this is outlined in section 88. However, if there's an injury or death, the disqualification is for six months from the date that the suspension takes place.

We are told that Alberta is the first province to have a six-month administrative suspension for impaired driving that leads to bodily injury or death. A person whose licence is suspended receives a 21-day temporary licence so that they can get their affairs in order, and that's fine.

It's interesting that also in this legislation we will enable a person whose licence has been suspended to appeal to the transportation safety board. No time frames are specified within which the board must respond to an appeal, and I understand that the Manitoba system is different than this. But Alberta Transportation staff indicate that it is the intention to hold appeals within the 21-day period of a temporary licence. However, they say that this is not written into the legislation because it will occasionally save difficulties if there is a delay.

Now, we all know that alcohol-related driving is an offence under the Criminal Code, but it's worth pointing out, Madam Speaker, that the provincial suspension is separate from the charge under the Criminal Code which will be brought before the courts. Even if someone successfully appeals the provincial licence suspension, their case still goes before the court. Alternatively, it is possible that they could be found not guilty by the court. The person could then appeal to the Alberta transportation safety board. The provincial suspension is not automatically terminated if the court finds the person not guilty. So they may have got off in court on a technicality, yet the board could continue the suspension.

Now, whenever we talk about the need for an administrative licence suspension, some people would say that this is draconian, but I don't think so. About 100 people die in Alberta each year because

of drunk driving and drunk drivers. Some of these drivers are chronic repeat offenders. Of drivers involved in injury collisions in 1997, 6 percent had consumed alcohol before the crash, compared to 21 percent in fatal collisions. As the severity of the collision increases, the involvement of alcohol dramatically increases as well.

Madam Speaker, it should also be noted that Alberta has a high accident rate compared to other provinces. In 1997 Alberta had the second highest fatality rate, and it has been 1.5 per 10,000 population in three of the last five years. I believe Saskatchewan has the highest fatality rate if we use a comparison with the same data. But evidence indicates that a licence suspension reduces accidents. PAID, the People Against Impaired Driving organization, believes that the automatic licence suspension is long overdue.

I understand they submitted a 5,300-name petition to this government asking for a suspension of anyone charged with impaired driving or refusing to provide a breathalyzer sample. However, I understand they are annoyed that a 21-day temporary licence will now be given instead of the seven-day licence as originally proposed. But the idea of a suspended licence, this administrative licence suspension, is one they generally support, and this group has been for a number of years very active in advising all governments how to deal with drunk drivers and the accidents that are caused by them.

The administrative licence suspension in other provinces is working as well. We're in that respect just catching up with Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, just to name a few.

Now, some people have said that an administrative penalty infringes on human rights. I think we should discuss this briefly if we have time. With an administrative suspension a driver is being assumed guilty without trial. This undermines the fundamental principle of law that a person is assumed innocent until proven guilty. In this situation the police officer is both the accuser and the judge, and that's in the short term.

This suspension attracts a lot of interest and with it legal opinions, but I think we have to look at the common good. We have to look at what's going on across the province. We have to look at people driving vehicles and not respecting the rights of others. It's a difficult subject, but we have to look at this. In fact, the administrative suspension system is independent of the courts and the federal system. By having this 21-day temporary licence, it should be possible for people to appeal their suspension before this transportation safety board before the 21-day period expires, but we need to question to find out if this will happen. Hopefully this will come about in committee, Madam Speaker.

We also have to look at court challenges. I don't know whether they'll happen or not in this province, but in other provinces there have been recent rulings that an administrative licence suspension is legal. Whether it's a seven-day or 21-day suspension, it doesn't matter; it's legal. We shall see if any court challenges come this way in this province.

4:30

The graduated licensing for learners. The student parliamentarian from Edmonton-Gold Bar, as I said before, read this with great interest. She's a grade 10 student. She is taking driver training, and her comments on this were I think reflective of her generation: she didn't feel it was fair. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora spoke earlier of how he did not have the training and now his children were obligated to receive this training, whether that was fair or not. But there's also the proposal that, well, if we have this graduated licensing for learners, then perhaps insurance rates will decrease. Now, that remains to be seen, but that is another side of the debate, and I would be interested to hear comments from other hon. members regarding this.

We have to look at traffic collision statistics for Alberta. The year

1997 is a good place to start. These statistics show that 16 and 17 year olds were more likely to be involved in a casualty collision than any other age group. The next age group most likely to be involved in casualty crashes was 18 to 19 year olds. Both of these groups had rates of over 25 casualty accidents per 1,000 licensed drivers compared with 14.2 per 1,000 for all drivers.

I realize my time is up, Madam Speaker, but I'm disappointed that I did not get to finish my remarks, and I look forward to furthering them in committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to stand to speak on Bill 24, Traffic Safety Act. There's been a huge amount of work put forward by the department in the process of putting this together. I understood, as I read it, that was quite a feat in itself.

What I am looking at, really, is that it combines all acts relating to traffic and highway safety. By doing this, it amalgamates and updates four acts: the Highway Traffic Act, the Motor Vehicle Administration Act, the Motor Transport Act, and the Off-highway Vehicle Act. It introduces administrative licence suspensions and gradual licensing, both of which should reduce accidents, and moves many of the specific details into regulations. We can argue and we can talk about regulations and where this should be brought in, but if we can actually produce something that is going to make the Traffic Safety Act safer . . . The Traffic Safety Act discussion paper was the basis of the public input at public meetings that were held across the province, in my understanding. The meetings by everybody's intent -- and people like our member the critic from Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert say that the minister has done a very good job on this thing.

This is what came out of Bill 50 being introduced last fall. Bill 50, the Traffic Safety Act, was tabled in the Legislature in the fall of 1998 to allow further public comments. However, there was no formal process for this. Lobby groups called us, put their input to the actual government, and continue their work in respect to riding in the back of pickups and the wearing of bicycle helmets.

Some municipalities complained that they did not want these issues left up to municipal discretion, and they want it brought back under provincial jurisdiction. This is another typical way of downloading. I talk downloading when it comes to monetary functions and taxes and so on, but here's another case where we here should be setting out some course on this one.

The kind of co-operation that brought this legislation together I think is very, very good. As I read the articles in the paper and converse in the coffee shops, like other people say, and meet with people on a daily basis, now that this bill has been talked about and people are reading about it in the paper, they have brought up different arguments for and against.

Here we talk about seat belts. When seat belts were brought in a few years ago, the arguments for and against were very strong. You can look at it in different ways. We should be looking at bicycle helmets in the same category as back when seat belts were brought in as mandatory. You know, when we think of seat belts, I for one was very stubborn about it. I for one was very reluctant to put it on. There again it came from an experience in life, an accident when I was almost 18 years old. I spent a year not walking after that accident. If I would've had a seat belt on, I wouldn't be here today. But when you look at statistics and everything else, the argument comes into play that seat belts do mean something, and I do believe there are many people that are actually saved by them.

Bicycle helmets is another item that I really think we should be placing a lot of emphasis on. If we're talking about bicycle helmets, we have to think about: is it children, is it adults, or is it both? We have had debate on our side on this related item, and my push on this would be that if they're brought in, they have to be brought in for both.

I have a son that has ridden thousands of miles on his bike. As soon as the snow has melted, he's on his bike and he's riding all the time. He has gone on major, major trips throughout the province with his church group, the Young Life group, and when he is on those trips, he has to wear a helmet. But here's the same person who, at the age of 14 years old, had a major bicycle accident. Somebody undid the quick release on the front of his bike. Eighty-eight stitches, a broken jaw, a broken collarbone, and a broken shoulder later, he still seems to be the same as people that have to be forced into wearing or penalized into wearing seat belts.

Then when it comes to head injuries -- and what a lot of doctors call them are donors. With respect to bicycle helmets the research findings and the studies substantiate overwhelmingly that the use of bicycle helmets reduces injuries, reduces health care costs. We know that specifically Alberta neurosurgeons have campaigned for mandatory bicycle helmets for all ages. The Alberta Safe Kids campaign, which is based at the University of Alberta hospital in the Stollery Children's Health Centre, has also lobbied hard that mandatory bicycle helmets are a major item.

I think about how I gave a small bike to my oldest granddaughter awhile back, and what went with it was a helmet. I think back to 1976, when hockey helmets came in, and 90 percent of the parents on the team that I coached -- and I did run the community rink at the time. Maybe at that time we only had four or five hockey teams in the community, but there were a couple of parents that came and just gave me a complete blast. Helmets actually came in a couple of years earlier, but when the masks came in, they said that there wasn't a hope in heck that their children were going to wear masks, that it was bad enough that helmets came in and were forced on them. My argument was that I liked their son being on my team, but if he didn't have that mask on the next night, he wasn't going to be on the ice. Whether the parent had played for the New York Rangers or whoever he played for, because he was quite boisterous, it wasn't my job to argue with him. My job was to make sure that his son did have the mask on.

4:40

We talk about motorcycle helmets and the operation of motorcycles. I don't believe anybody, except for those that want to wear Hell's Angels on the back of their jacket, wants to go without some protection on their head. I was quite surprised at probably one of the first bills that came out after I was elected, on skidoo helmets. I thought one day that we were all talking in the same direction, that the helmets were the greatest thing we brought in, except for the fact that one of the members opposite said: "You grew up on a farm. Didn't you feed cattle by pulling hay on the old hood of a car behind a skidoo?" I said: yeah. He said: "Well, just think. Are you going to force the farmers to wear helmets?"

Well, we should have brought amendments in at that time which actually suggested that on somebody's own property they take the responsibility on themselves to make sure that skidoo helmets were brought in. Well, that might come back some other day. I hope it does.

I hate to think that a lot of good acts, a lot of different legislation is being held up and the biggest percentage of Albertans are being held up by ransom of jurisdictions, constituencies, and people putting their points forward that in some cases aren't substantiated

by the percentage numbers that are actually out there. Maybe cities, where more and more people have a chance of being -- there are greater accidents, more accidents in cities. It's the same thing, I would suggest, with bicycle helmets.

[The Speaker in the chair]

When I go back to other arguments within this, I look at riding in the back of pickup trucks. There again if there's a problem with this, I would like somebody to stand up and actually tell me why we shouldn't be bringing in regulations so people do not ride in the back of pickup trucks. I think you've heard from a number of our members that if you have to wear a seat belt to sit in the front of a pickup, then you should be wearing a seat belt to ride in the back of one. I for one, with the pickup I own and my daughter drives, the first time I ever hear or think or whatever that has happened, that truck will be parked very tightly on my driveway, and she won't budge it again.

I was behind somebody on a Saturday night coming back from Benton. There were three or four young fellows sitting in the back of a truck, and not only was the truck weaving in and out, but these guys were having a great time in the back there. Well, I just don't believe that this is safe. If you're on your own land and you have to carry somebody a short distance, because you're not going to be driving through the fields that fast, that maybe is an exception. But when you get onto major highways or secondary roads, then I don't believe in it at all.

Graduated drivers' licences. This, depending on the age of your children, probably is a controversial item in your own house. I for one am fortunate that it isn't coming down heavy on me, but a lot of phone calls have come in that they think it's a good item. Other people think it's not necessarily a good item. I really believe that to push this one forward, we have to understand it. In a graduated licence system there's an intermediate stage between the learner's stage and unrestricted driving. We already have a two-year probationary licence in Alberta, but now there would be certain conditions attached.

I believe that if the whole bill was around this particular item -- I kind of compare it to what happened with helmets for skidoos. I don't believe it'll go through. I believe it would be imperative in the country areas that when that child is of age to drive and you have to have somebody to go get parts -- if somebody has to be out there on the road too, then I believe that the vote won't go through. It doesn't mean that I don't have some thoughts behind it, and I do believe it's a good idea.

I do believe that probably the most important item in this one is bringing in a curfew for first-time drivers. It would help both those in the country areas as well as the urban areas due to the fact that it would put some controls on what happens. It is proven that the age groups that are in the accidents out there are usually young. There is a motion brought forward by the Member for St. Albert on insurance. That is one that I've lived through for a few years, having two sons, very expensive, who drive and now a daughter. I wouldn't say she's any better driver. I do think, as you drive around the city or even on the highways, that the young ladies who are driving -- there are a lot more of them than there were before, and insurance should be right behind it. I know I'm going to be getting it in the ear if somebody sends this *Hansard* home.

I do believe that there are quite a few different things in this act, and I hope it's all brought together with a few other things in legislation.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my leave and sit down.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Utilities to close the debate.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: I want to thank everyone for the comments that were made. We certainly will be addressing those when we go into committee.

I think the two areas that probably solicited the most discussion were the areas of bicycle helmets and riding in the back of pickups. I just want to point out that we've made some changes from the original draft Bill 50 that came forward last fall in that what we are doing is providing legislation that will, through regulation, enable us to deal with riding in the back of pickups and the bicycle helmet.

We've had a great deal of input on those particular issues, and in this particular case I think what we're really going to have to do is deal with the public during the summer to try and get a better reading. There seems to be a great deal of misunderstanding as to the use of bicycle helmets. That's something that we're going to have to develop a strong education campaign for. We're doing very well with the snow machines. Almost 98 percent of snow machine operators do use helmets, so indeed we will be looking at that. We'll be looking at answering all of the questions that will be coming forward.

At this time I'd like to move second reading of Bill 24.

[Motion carried; Bill 24 read a second time]

head: Government Bills and Orders  
head: Third Reading  
(continued)

**Bill 33**  
**Appropriation Act, 1999**

[Adjourned debate April 22: Mr. Renner]

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The appropriation bill, again, is calling for expense of over \$14 billion. Of course, part of the spending plans are based on the revenue expectations of the government. I want to spend just a minute talking about those revenue expectations and the impact that those expectations have had on the tax policies as well. I do have some enduring concerns that we haven't been able to see fully addressed either through the estimates debate or earlier stages of this appropriation bill.

The way the government raises revenue and then makes its decisions has been the topic of some discussion, but we have not really had adequate debate, I don't believe, on the government's projection in Budget '99 for the expectation that its tax reform will generate 40 percent feedback. To put it more plainly, what the government is expecting is that for every dollar the government doesn't collect as a result of tax cuts, 40 cents will come back to the government in the form of tax revenue based on increased economic activity.

4:50

This 40 percent feedback is rather remarkable, Mr. Speaker. There is not an example anywhere in history that I can find which shows that the tax cuts at the personal income tax level have resulted in 40 percent feedback. In fact, the most optimistic studies peg it at around 18, 20, 22 percent. The Provincial Treasurer has talked about what happened with Reagan, what happened with Kennedy, but there are tremendous differences both in scales of economy and in the cycles in terms of bust and boom, where we're at in terms of recession and postrecession, where we're at in terms of government

commitment to capital spending, et cetera, et cetera. So it's very hard to learn any real lessons, but even those optimistic experiences that the Treasurer would have us rely on do not indicate that we'll get anything near a 40 percent feedback. So I just continue to be curious about that and would hope that we hear soon from this government how they have come to that conclusion, what studies they have to confirm their rather optimistic view.

Another question I have, which has never been answered by this government, is why the government wants to stay with the .5 percent flat tax and eliminate instead the 8 percent surtax on Alberta taxpayers. It seems to me that this Treasurer has some propensity in this Assembly for supporting flat taxes, and I would hope that it's not his personal bias that is behind this policy but that in fact it's one of careful, analytical thought and study. Again I would call upon the government to put before the Assembly the studies it has, the analysis it's done, the work it must have completed that led it to conclude that there would be more economic benefit, more stimulation to the economy by eliminating this one surtax instead of the other.

It's interesting to note that the provincial income tax 5 percent surtax revenue will creep up by \$50 million, Mr. Speaker. An additional \$50 million is projected to be collected by this government before the fiscal plan that's been put before the Assembly would see this tax eliminated. In fiscal year '98-99 the forecast is that it'll raise \$324 million. In '99-2000 it'll raise an estimated \$308 million and in fiscal year 2000-2001, \$325 million. If you calculate that against the actual amount raised in '97-98, you come up with this \$50 million tax grab. I submit that this flat tax could be eliminated now, save Alberta taxpayers that \$50 million, and that would be far more fair than the government's plans. I just cannot for the life of me understand why the government has made the decisions that it has in its tax reform proposals. Of course, it's all that more difficult to understand because we're not being provided with the study, with the analytical information that they surely must have reviewed before putting this proposal before the Assembly.

While I'm talking about the .5 percent flat tax on Albertans, let me just indicate to the Assembly who it is that's going to pay that extra \$50 million. Those earning under \$30,000 will pay \$14 million in additional taxes. Those in the \$30,000 to \$100,000 income category will pay \$27 million, by far the lion's share of that additional tax revenue. Those earning over \$100,000, interestingly enough, are going to pay the least. They're going to pay only \$9 million of that. So the lowest income earners are going to pay more than the highest income earners. Of course those of us who live in the middle, Mr. Speaker, are going to have to pay the bulk of it. Those rare, privileged few will be able to escape without paying what I would consider to be their fair share of this \$50 million tax creep that finds its way into the provincial government's plans. Questions that need to be answered indeed.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had a chance to meet with some bankers responsible for financial institutions here in the province of Alberta, and they have a pretty rosy outlook for the economy of Alberta. They're pegging real GDP growth to be between 2 and a half and 3 percent. There's some debate over whether housing starts in the short term will be up or down, but at least they're going to be constant. Oil, according to the forecasts they shared with me, will probably be above what the province has now projected, what fiscal plan '99 is based on, maybe as much as a couple of dollars a barrel above. In fact, the expectation is that we may see oil sustained at about \$17.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this was all very, very good news indeed. But it seems to me that if these bankers had the ability to give these kinds of forecasts and to base their plans on it -- and remember that banks

are not only amongst the most profitable corporations in Canada; they're the largest taxpayers in Canada. We know that the banks take economic forecasting very seriously, and if they're able to sit back and do this level of analysis and provide these forecasts, it makes me wonder what the province was thinking, because I would assume that Alberta Treasury would take economic forecasting very seriously as well.

There are some marked differences between the forecasts that are coming from the banks in terms of the price of oil, housing starts, real GDP growth, and the forecasts coming from Alberta Treasury. Also, we could talk about interest rate spreads, a marked difference there. We could talk about the inflation rate. We could also talk about the exchange rate of the Canadian dollar versus the U.S. dollar.

In every instance even the most pessimistic forecasts coming from Canadian banks are more optimistic than the ones coming from the provincial government. Now, we could say that the provincial government is being conservative. Of course that's a word that doesn't come to my lips easily. I usually say prudent. And we could say that being prudent in budget forecasts is appropriate, but at what point does that prudence become a little misleading? At what point does it become a little bit of a shell game, where the province is going to underestimate all of those things on purpose so as to create a larger economic cushion than what's forecast so they have more money to either put towards the debt or perhaps use for some rather sensational headline-grabbing spending announcements right on the eve of an election. I just wonder out loud. [interjection] Mr. Speaker, before I -- no, I'll move on. I will not be distracted by the minister of advanced education today. I will move on.

The provincial government has shown that it can be parsimonious when it comes to its spending, Mr. Speaker, and that's good. That's good. I think we should squeeze a tax dollar pretty hard before we spend it and make sure that we're getting good value for it, but parsimony is not necessarily the only value that we need to apply to budgeting. We can take a look at what happens when you replace good governance with just bottom-line thinking. We need look no further than the headlines in Calgary and the announcement today that a 72-hour strike notice has been served and the fact that there is a direct, straight-line relationship between government of Alberta policy and the underfunding of the Calgary board of education which has led to this impasse between the board and the teachers.

You know who suffers in all this, Mr. Speaker? In Calgary 100,000 students suffer through all of this, and it's not just limited to Calgary. We could talk about what's going on in West Yellowhead as well. We could talk about what's going on right here in my hometown of Edmonton. But we are faced immediately, of course, with the looming crisis of a teachers' strike in Calgary because this government cannot get its mind off the bottom line for no reason other than to just demonstrate that they can write a smaller cheque. It's about time this government demonstrated it knew how to write an appropriate-size cheque for such critically important programs as public education, public health care, et cetera.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, I recently had a chance to reread the lecture series by

John Ralston Saul that was reprinted in the form of a monograph under the title *The Unconscious Civilization*. It's a very interesting read, and I came across a quote on page 156 of the book that reminded me immediately of the situation we face here in Alberta with the discussion that we have about growth and balancing growth against public priorities and how much we legislate restrictions to growth in things like environmental protection and what it is that we value in terms of growth in economic development versus what it is we value in terms of social development in community strength and health.

Mr. Speaker, the quote reads as follows:

For example, growth as we currently understand it classifies education as cost, thus a liability. A golf ball, on the other hand, is an asset, and the sale of it is a measurable factor of growth. A face lift is an element of economic activity, while a heart bypass is a liability which the economy must finance. Holidays are among the pearls of the service industry, while child care is a cost.

Mr. Speaker, when I read those words it crystalized for me the dilemma that we face here in Alberta. The dilemma is that this government since 1993 has been characterizing all of those social goods, all of those public-good items that I value, as costs and therefore liabilities and refusing to acknowledge that in fact public health care is a benefit. It's not a liability. In fact when you talk to business leaders, they'll tell you that one of the reasons why they like doing business in Canada and why they might even locate in Alberta is because it's easy for them to attract a workforce here because of the strength of public health care. When you talk to people about the value of public education, they say that that is a business asset to them.

So it is a dilemma for me why it is that these are so apparent to me, to my colleagues in the Official Opposition, to business and industry leaders that I meet with, to bankers, et cetera, but that it seems so unclear to the front bench of government, why it is that they would continue to do as Saul has said: count these public goods just as liabilities and therefore something detrimental to the bottom line. It is ideological thinking that is lazy and fuzzy at best, Mr. Speaker, and I think it does a disservice to the hardworking taxpayers of this province.

I will conclude my remarks by saying that Budget '99 again follows the mold of other budgets that we have seen come from the current Conservative government, a budget that I think is not totally honest about the real projections or expectations about revenues, a budget that does not reflect the priorities that I hold and the priorities necessarily of other members of this Assembly and the priorities certainly of many taxpayers and of my constituents, and a budget which is really designed to give the government ultimate political flexibility instead of ensuring ultimate accountability to taxpayers for ensuring that we all get value for the tax dollars that are spent. I find it very difficult to support such a budget, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer to close the debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 33 read a third time]

[At 5:06 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]