

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, May 18, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/05/18
[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon. Let us pray.

O Lord, we give thanks for the bounty of our province: our land, our resources, and our people.

We pledge ourselves to act as good stewards on behalf of all Albertans.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure for me today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly a very distinguished guest who is seated in your gallery. Colonel Hamish Macdonald is the commanding officer of the British army training unit at Suffield, or BATUS.

BATUS is the premier training facility for the British army. Its mission is to train armed forces as battle groups for operations worldwide. Since its inception in 1972 BATUS has trained 157 battle groups, each consisting of 1,200 men and an opposing force of 300. In fact, Mr. Speaker, two battle groups that trained at BATUS in 1998 are now serving in Macedonia in preparation for operations in Kosovo.

The BATUS operation is supported by Canadian Forces Base Suffield, and 1,500 people, mostly civilian, are employed to sustain the training. The annual operating budget for BATUS is about \$750 million, with direct and indirect spin-offs to the Medicine Hat economy of approximately \$80 million. The close ties enjoyed between the people of Medicine Hat and BATUS were exemplified in 1997, when the city of Medicine Hat bestowed BATUS with the honour of freedom of the city, the first and only such honour that has been granted to another country in western Canada.

Colonel Macdonald has had a distinguished military career. He's served in various capacities throughout Europe, including command of the Queen's Dragoon Guards in Germany, and in 1997 he was appointed command, British army training unit, Suffield.

With Colonel Macdonald today is his ADC, Captain Ian Mollison of the South Alberta Light Horse. I would ask both these gentlemen to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from all Members of the Legislative 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 this petition signed by 41 people. They are physicians and registered nurses of Alberta petitioning "the Legislative Assembly to amend Bill 24 – Traffic Safety Act to legislate the compulsory wearing of bicycle helmets for all Albertans of all ages."

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like with your

permission to present a petition signed by 235 Edmontonians. This is an SOS petition, and they are urging

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

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table with the Assembly a petition signed by 75 residents of Calgary. They 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.

This of course is part of the SOS petitions.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to stand and table with the Assembly the largest petition that I have tabled in my tenure as an MLA in this Assembly. The residents are urging "the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to introduce legislation to halt the grizzly bear 'harvest' in Alberta." It is signed by 3,234 Albertans.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the minister responsible for children's services I have an SOS petition signed by 34 residents from her constituency.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to stand and submit a petition on behalf of 60 people from the city of Medicine Hat. This is an SOS petition urging

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

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present an SOS petition on behalf of 154 signatories from Edmonton, Leduc, New Sarepta, Devon, Beaumont, and Sherwood Park. This is 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-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like with your permission to present a petition today signed by 196 individuals from the fine town of Devon. This petition is urging

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

This number of 196 brings the total petition signatures to over 16,750.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I beg leave to present a petition signed by 177 Albertans from Red Deer, Sylvan Lake, Lacombe, Penhold, Leduc, Fort Saskatchewan, Gibbons, Clondonald, Dewberry, Elk Point, Strome, Camrose, Killam, Willingdon, Vilna, and Spedden. They are urging the Government to increase funding of children in public and separate schools to a level that covers increased costs due to contract settlements, curriculum changes, technology, and aging schools.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that at this time those petitions presented the other day be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Might I request that the two petitions I introduced yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to

1. strongly condemn racism and all other forms of discrimination;
2. sensitize and educate its own officers and members to human rights;
3. urge the Government to include, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act; and other related materials in the school curriculum; and
4. take other necessary steps to promote human rights in Alberta.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, hereby petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to introduce a Bill banning the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals so that the integrity of public, universal health care may be maintained.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I'm giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

I'm also giving notice that tomorrow I will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I believe there will be a great number of these today, so we'll begin with the Minister of Public Works, Supply and Services.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the response to Motion for a Return 181.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling summaries of reports and studies for the period January 1, '95, to February 16, '99, assessing the feasibility of expanding the government's reporting entity to include universities, colleges, technical institutes, RHAs, and school boards. It's at the request of the opposition in the ongoing spirit of openness and accountability.

1:40

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

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two tablings. First, I'm tabling five copies of the government of Alberta's response to the Final Report, Alberta Summit on Justice. It marks the beginning of a new path for our justice system as we enter the new millennium, and I would like to take a brief moment to thank everyone who dedicated much time and effort to this successful process.

My second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is five copies of a letter signed by 34 CAPS officers that I received yesterday. The letter in part states, "We would like to get the message to Ms Olsen that we are sick and tired of her political attempts to discredit this organization." The letter contains similar other statements.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod and table a letter that I've written to him. The Member for Livingstone-Macleod is the president of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region. His term expires in June of this year at the conference which PNWER is holding in Edmonton.

I've written a letter transmitting to him the recognition for the outstanding contribution that he's made as president during the reorganization of the organization, setting a clear mandate for the organization, enhancing the role of the private sector, and furthering transboundary regional co-operation. I think it's appropriate. I wish there was a better way to recognize the outstanding contribution of the Member for Livingstone-Macleod to that organization and to Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Labour.

MR. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It pleases me greatly to be able to table five copies of the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta 1998 annual report and accompanying three-year business plan, 1999-2002.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1998.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table seven copies of the long-term care review committee's summary of consultations with the public and the Long Term Care Review Proceedings: Summary of Consultations with Experts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of tabling a report titled *Strengthening our Future: A Report on Action Youth Are Taking to Combat Social Problems*. This report was produced by Travis Dhanraj, a grade 11 student at Lester B. Pearson high school in northeast Calgary. The report deals with youth involvement in social issues and, in particular, child poverty.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling to make. It's copies of a letter written by James Burke, who is the Alberta representative of the Canadian Injured Workers Alliance. The letter, addressed to the Minister of Labour, is demanding a public inquiry into the Workers' Compensation Board.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a document I received from freedom of information from the Alberta Research Council. This is a speech given by the research and approvals officer of the Department of Labour regarding pine shakes. The speech indicates that the province of Alberta has its own evaluation system for innovative construction products.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. The first is a letter from the Kananaskis Coalition to the Minister of Environmental Protection drawing attention to the petitions with over 6,000 signatures who want Kananaskis protected from further commercial and industrial development and asking for the release of the results and recommendations from the Praxis public consultation process.

The second tabling is comprised of eight letters to the Premier from Albertans who are opposed to Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act.

The final tabling is in response to the Minister of Energy last week when he made the statement that with regards to electrical deregulation the residual value returning to the people of Alberta could be as high as \$2 billion. In fact, Mark Drazen of Drazen Consulting released a report, part of which I am tabling, which states that the residual value is really more than \$3.4 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, we need the Minister of Energy to 'fess up and tell us what he plans to do with that extra \$1.4 billion.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of *A Proposal for Private Workers' Compensation Insurance in Alberta*, prepared by the Insurance Bureau of Canada, dated October 1998.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the required number of copies. It's from the physicians and nurses of Alberta who have compiled stats to reflect the benefits of bicycle helmet usage and the grave consequences paid by those who choose not to follow this safety practice.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies each of two tablings. These are both reports prepared by the exceptional research team in the Liberal opposition office. The first report details the evolution of thinking on the part of the Provincial Treasurer when it comes to user-fee taxes in Alberta.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a report that has chronicled the support that the hon. Treasurer has shown for policies put into place by the Leader of the Official Opposition when, in fact, she was the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora and first the Minister of Education and then the Minister of Health.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and table five copies of a letter written to you with respect to the incapacity of the Minister of Family and Social Services to table answers to motions for returns within the 30-day time period.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is copies of a report from the University of Calgary Faculty Association entitled *Our Faltering Future*, which talks about the significant impact of provincial cuts on that excellent postsecondary facility.

The second tabling is copies of correspondence between one Jerry Pitts, a Calgarian, and the Premier's office related to a number of problems with accessing health care at the Tom Baker cancer centre in the city of Calgary.

Thank you very much.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have six tablings I'd like to submit today. These are from different groups in Alberta that are concerned about Bill 31. The first is from Energy Advisors Ltd., an oil exploration company. The second is from Renaissance Energy Ltd. The third is from Canadian 88 Energy Corp. The fourth is from the Alberta Grazing Leaseholders Association. The fifth is from the Western Stock Growers' Association. The last one is quite appropriate; it's from Square Deal Ranch. The common thread in those six submissions is that they would like to see the final passage of third reading of Bill 31 delayed until the appropriate consultation is put in place to work out what they see as discrepancies between the parts of Bill 31 that are being put into legislation that are not able to be dealt with in the regulations.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly the parents of our young page Daniel Novak, a constituent of Edmonton-Manning and a grade 10 student at Old Scona. The main thing is he's the winner of the page speaking competition. Daniel is the only child but says the family has two dogs named Casey and JoJo. Daniel's mother, Rita, is a grade 5 teacher at McLeod elementary school, located in the constituency of Edmonton-Manning.

Daniel's father, Dan Danylchuk, is a locomotive engineer for CN. Mr. Speaker, they're in your gallery and with your permission I'd ask that they'd now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I have a second introduction. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two young ladies working for me at the Edmonton-Manning constituency. The first one is Miss Laureen Kennedy. Laureen has just finished her fourth year of political science, and this is the third summer she has worked in my constituency office. Miss Rachel Bocock has just finished her second year of political science. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly three very, very special guests from the riding of Edmonton-Rutherford: Lori Stewart-Jervis, accompanied by her two daughters, Lauren Jervis and Carolyn Jervis. They're in the public gallery. What makes this so significant is that Lori Stewart's great grandfather was the hon. Charles Stewart, the third Liberal Premier of the province of Alberta. So if they would please stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have two introductions today. I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Travis Dhanraj, a grade 11 student at Lester B. Pearson high school in northeast Calgary. Travis is the author of the report I tabled earlier on today titled *Strengthening our Future: A Report on Action Youth Are Taking to Combat Social Problems*. Travis is a dynamic youth who demonstrates great qualities of care and concern for the welfare of the underprivileged. He is accompanied today by his mother, Mrs. Gloria Dhanraj, and his father, Paul Dhanraj. I request that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am most pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Edmonton-Riverview constituents Kim and Lu Ziola. Mr. and Mrs. Ziola are also the parents of Ryder Ziola, a page in our Assembly. Kim is an architect in our city of Edmonton and Lu has provided excellent expertise in the development of the Edmonton-Riverview web site. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through you to members of the Assembly Jeremy Hexham. Jeremy is a poli sci student of Mount Royal College in Calgary and is currently working out of the Calgary-McCall constituency office as a STEP student. Jeremy is in Edmonton today to observe the proceedings of this Assembly and learn more about the workings of the Legislative Assembly. I request Jeremy to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is Mr. Mitchell Kiejko, a friend of mine who is here to observe the proceedings of the House. He's

seated in the members' gallery. I would like him to rise at this time and accept the very warm welcome of this House.

It is also a delight for me to rise and introduce to you and through you 43 students, teachers, and parents from Elizabeth Seton school, which is located in my constituency. I'll just mention their names here. We have teachers Bob Boyechko and Andrew Patan and parents Mrs. Dodd, Mrs. Walsh, and Mrs. Stotyn. They are seated in the public gallery, and I would like to ask them to rise at this time and accept the very warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for St. Albert I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 54 students from Albert Lacombe school. They are accompanied by Mrs. Victoria Barron and Mr. Cyril Binette, their teachers, and Mr. Barry Learning, Richard Hill, Maureen Edwards, and Michelle Palmer. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Darrell Stone, the chairman of the Alberta Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association; Barrie McPhalen, the president of the Alberta Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association; Andy Vandertol, the president of the Consulting Engineers of Alberta; Shirley Mercier, the executive director of the Consulting Engineers of Alberta; as well as Alberta Transportation and Utilities staff member Tim Hawnt, who is the executive director of programming and professional services.

Today the Alberta Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association and the Consulting Engineers of Alberta and AT&U signed a better relationship for better highways charter. The charter agreement will enhance present working relationships and work towards delivering the safest and best value highway program for the benefit of all Albertans.

I'd ask that the honoured guests rise and receive the usual warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to Members of this Legislative Assembly 30 visitors from Viking school, including 24 students. Of course, Viking school is right in the middle of the famous home of the Sutter hockey family. They're accompanied today by teacher Mrs. Muriel Hill and parent helpers Mrs. Jackie Neefe, Mrs. Joyce Winczura, Mr. Lionel Fraser, Mr. Greg Andrukow, and Mr. Arnold Hanson. I just have a note here that they are happy to see their government in action. I'd ask them to rise in the public gallery and receive the traditional warm applause from the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal and Official Opposition.

Catholic School System

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Worried by this government's repeated attempts at undermining them, Catholic schools, ratepayers, and educators have been vigilantly defending their branch of Alberta's publicly funded education system. Now many Catholic educators and families are faced with a new concern: increased pressure to merge or integrate separate schools with public schools. Catholic families are seeing this pressure in Edmonton's Twin Brooks community and in the town of Brooks. They don't find this acceptable. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Is it government policy to encourage public and separate schools to merge or at least share the same facilities?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that this government has an outstanding record of supporting Catholic education in the province of Alberta.

With respect to capital projects, Mr. Speaker, we do encourage schools, school boards, to share facilities. That sharing of facilities might be with other public amenities; for example, there is a Catholic school in Calgary that has space for public school students. It has a parks and recreation twin arena in it. It has an Olympic-size swimming pool. It has a facility for the Calgary Public Library. Those just make sense, that where we're building public facilities, all these dollars come out of one taxpayer's pocket.

So, Mr. Speaker, to the extent that we can encourage multiple users of facilities that we build throughout the province of Alberta, of course that's something that we want to do.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is again to the Minister of Education. Given the demand for new schools in the faster growing regions of the province, will construction of both public and separate schools be approved as in the past or does this government see it as an either/or proposition?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we have a process for the approval of capital projects throughout the province. That has not changed. What we have also done, however, is in our most recent business plan put \$10 million into an innovative capital project fund. If school boards come forward with innovative uses of capital – perhaps joint-use facilities might be one of those examples – then they might be able to speed up the process for approval of their projects.

With respect to meeting the needs that are established by school boards throughout the province, the hon. member knows that school boards establish their priority list. We meet those priorities when it comes to health and safety issues. We meet those priorities when it comes to essential need for new space.

2:00

So, Mr. Speaker, where there is existing space available, we encourage the use of that existing space. In the cases where there is full utilization of existing facilities within a jurisdiction, our priority of building new space or adding portables, as the case may be – that's been done in the past, and it will continue in the future.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplemental again is to the Minister of Education. What assurances can this government give Catholic school supporters that the separate and equal doctrine will be maintained when it comes to Catholic schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, that's already established in our policy. The hon. member may need a reminder, but he may recall a time in this province when undeclared property taxes by default went to the

public education system. Well, we've gone a long way since then. Now the funding follows the student within the public or the Catholic system so that if 30 percent of the students in a jurisdiction are Catholic school students, then that's the percentage of the funding that goes to those students.

Mr. Speaker, there could be no fairer policy than what we currently have in terms of funding Catholic education. I've spoken with trustees with individual boards throughout the province as well as with the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, and I can assure this hon. member, as I have assured Catholic trustees and their boards throughout the province, that Catholic education is absolutely valued by this government. It has been doing a good job and continues to do a good job, and we expect that we will continue to live up to our commitment of recognizing the rights of Catholic educators and education in this province.

THE SPEAKER: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through letters, faxes, and e-mail, students, parents, and teachers from across Alberta continue speaking out for children in their schools. Three more communities have raised questions, first with government members and now publicly about what this government is doing to their students and to their schools. My questions are to the Minister of Education. For parents at Manning's Rosary school, when will funding be adequate so that their school stops being bumped down the list and finally receives the upgrading to its library, gym, and classrooms needed to meet provincial standards?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, you know, this matter of individual schools coming up time and time again raised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods – I looked into the school that he raised the other day, a school in Morinville.

I reference *Hansard* at page 1663 on May 12, 1999, where the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods talked about students and parents in the Morinville area that were being charged user fees of \$200 to \$300. Well, I looked into that, and the fact is that at G.H. Primeau school grade 6 students are being charged a total of \$85 for things like textbook rentals, career and technology supplies, and student council fees; grade 7 and 8 students are being charged \$95 for similar supplies. Mr. Speaker, there are sports teams that do charge a fee in those schools: \$30 per student, which covers referees, uniforms, and travel. Parents may be asked – and I don't know if this is what's being referenced by the hon. member – to cover the cost of field trips. I don't know if that's the case in Morinville. This notion that kids are being charged \$200 or \$300 for user fees – I mean, presumably he knows it's either \$200 or \$300, but maybe he's just making it up and saying: well, it's somewhere between \$200 or \$300.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say that every time I look into one of these issues by the hon. member, only half the truth is being told. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has the floor, and for all other members who want to provide interjections, tomorrow at 6 a.m. the birds will rise. Please go and talk to them then.

DR. MASSEY: First of all a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

To the same minister: how is a school like Centennial school in

Wetaskiwin supposed to identify and help children at risk when provincial funding allows for a counselor to be in a school of 280 students for only one-and-a-half days a week?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member, having been a trustee in the public school system here in Edmonton, knows that it is the responsibility of school board trustees to make decisions about allocations of resources. He cannot have it both ways. He cannot say on the one hand that the province should be putting more money into programs X, Y, and Z, and at the same time, out of the other side of his mouth, be asking for an increase in the basic instructional grant rate.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that we grant roughly \$4,000 for each and every student in the province of Alberta for the basic instructional grant rate. It is incumbent upon trustees, including the trustees in the board that he referenced, to make decisions, and those decisions are about how resources are allocated at the local level. He cannot be speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: for Stettler middle school council why is the government diverting \$66 million for awards and administration of a top-down incentive program when that money is needed in their classrooms?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, what about the \$600 million we're directing towards schools in the province of Alberta over the next three years? Our budget is going from \$3.14 billion to \$3.74 billion over the next three years. The instructional grant, as I indicated, makes up the lion's share, the largest part of the dollars that we provide to school boards for education in the province of Alberta. That instructional grant rate is about \$4,000, meaning that for every 26 students in a school system that is about \$100,000 that that school board will have to allocate for things like special-needs students, perhaps for things like teachers, for aides, for resources, for textbooks, for library materials. That is a significant amount of money.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that we have a good education system in the province of Alberta that is occasionally excellent, and I would appreciate it if the hon. member would stop trying to erode public confidence in a fine system.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Entwistle, Nanton, Coaldale, Grimshaw, Brooks, Hinton, Vulcan, and the list goes on, Mr. Speaker. The schools are different; the problems are the same. My question is to the Minister of Education. How, with a cut of 700 teachers and an increase of 10,000 students, will these schools and others like them across the province avoid increasing class sizes?

2:10

MR. MAR: Olds, Coronation, Ponoka, Holden, Jack Stuart, Beaverlodge, Florence MacDougall: Mr. Speaker, the list is also filled with fine schools in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the hon. member has time and time again raised issues about individual schools, and again, whenever I've looked into the full circumstances of those schools, are there issues? Yes, there are. Are they as perilous as pointed out by the member of the opposition? They are not.

I've looked into so many of these cases. Niton Junction is an example, where the hon. member said there was a grade 4/5 split classroom. That's not true. You know, at Niton Junction there are

21 kids for every teacher in that school. With respect to schools that he's talked about with respect to things like capital improvement, he's failed to mention that some of those schools have been approved for capital improvement.

He's talked about schools all over the province. He talked about a school, Roche Miette, that raises money, where he alleged that the school council was raising money for the operations of the school for photocopying. Mr. Speaker, when I looked into that matter, the fact is that what the school council is raising money for is its own photocopying purposes.

I'll be happy also to address the issue of the increase in the number of students that is projected for the next school year, Mr. Speaker. There is a funding formula that recognizes that for every student there is in a school system, there will be the basic instructional grant for that student. If there's an increase in schools of 10,000 students, there will be an increase in the amount of funding. If you do the math, \$4,000 times 10,000 students, it's a significant amount of money that is going to be put back into the education system to make sure that there are teachers, that there are resources, that there are dollars for those students to learn in our schools.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: I'm going to recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods for a supplementary question, but I'm also going to convey a message to the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert. I have now received a number of notes from hon. members who say they cannot hear the responses being provided by the Minister of Education to the questions provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. I also received some face language and some eye contact from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods saying that he couldn't hear the answers either. So would the delightful Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert – and let's not have anyone confuse the fact that she may be viewed as the teacher's pet in the eyes of some – kindly cool it.

Education Funding

(continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Exshaw, Morinville, Stony Plain, Chinook: how, with a provincewide shortfall of \$223 million in capital funds, will these schools fix or replace crumbling buildings?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I regret that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was unable to hear my responses. I suspect that he's probably gone deaf in his right ear.

With respect to capital, Mr. Speaker, it is true that there are many demands upon the dollars that we provide for capital. We've responded by increasing the amount of money that we spend on capital over the last three years. Our budget is now \$140 million for capital. This particular year we also put in an additional onetime \$100 million to deal with capital projects, but as I've indicated to the hon. member on many occasions previously, while we do not manage to accept and approve every single request that is made by a school board, we do approve every request for matters that relate to health and safety of students and staff and every request that we receive for essential need for new space. We do go a long ways to meeting the requests for modernization requests that are made by school boards.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to note that school boards do prioritize their requests. They don't expect that every single request they make will be satisfied. We are making every effort to ensure that

our schools are safe and that they accommodate the number of students that are reflected in a school jurisdiction.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge: how, with the number of students they may serve capped, will these schools serve thousands of additional special-needs students deserving of our help?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we have not placed a cap on most categories of students with special needs. I would remind the hon. member that in September of this school year we increased the per capita funding for students with special needs, including in mild and moderate categories, by 30 percent. So not only would a school board receive the basic instructional grant for a student of \$4,000; if that student is a severe disability student, on top of that they would receive thousands of dollars more, bringing their aggregate funding for such a student to something in the range of \$12,000 or \$13,000.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to mild and moderate categories we were concerned about that. School boards indicated that in mild and moderate categories of students there were greater needs for those students. We increased our funding for that category of students as well by 30 percent. There is no cap on that. There is no cap on most of the categories of severe disabilities either.

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

Calgary Teachers' Collective Bargaining

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier of this province, the government of this province, the Minister of Education: all have been denying the fact that it is their deliberate underfunding policies of our schools which are creating problems for our school boards, for our teachers, for students, and for parents. Let me turn the attention of the House to Calgary. The disputes inquiry board report confirms what this government has been denying all along, and that is that underfunding is a real issue for the Calgary board of education. I'm going to ask the minister to stand up in this House and now take back his words that underfunding is not the source of the problem, and secondly, I'm going to ask him what he's going to do about it now.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the issues that are dealt with in the disputes inquiry board deal with a labour dispute between the Calgary board of education and the local of the Calgary teachers. It will be incumbent upon those two parties to decide whether or not they can afford to implement the recommendations that are contained in the disputes inquiry board report.

I would make this comment to the hon. member in response to his concern about the conclusions drawn by the drafter of the report, and that is this, Mr. Speaker. The drafter of the report had only the information that was conveyed to him by the union and by the school board. His professional background is as a mediator. It is not as an accountant.

So I think it is important to say that we do fund education appropriately in the province of Alberta. If other school boards in the province of Alberta are able to deliver a high quality of education, which they do – and I would comment also that the Calgary board of education also provides a high level of quality services to students in the city of Calgary. Mr. Speaker, if they are able to do that in other parts of the province within the financial parameters that we grant to them in terms of the instructional grant and other areas of funding, then we expect this board should be able to do the same thing.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The commissioner also draws attention to the very heavy debt load that the Calgary board of education presently is experiencing. It's going to be, I think, by the end of this year to the tune of about \$55 million. Does the minister have an answer for the board as to how to address it in light of the recommendation made by the commissioner?

MR. MAR: Well, I note, Mr. Speaker, that this is an issue that is of concern to the province, but it is also of concern to the board itself, and to the credit of the school board they do have a plan in place to reduce their level of debts. First of all, their first issue has to be to deal with a deficit. We have as a department worked with officials that are working in the Calgary board of education, people that I have a great deal of respect for, including the superintendent of schools in that city, Dr. Donna Michaels.

Mr. Speaker, I'm confident that the board and its chairman, Teresa Woo-Paw, are interested in making sure that they are fiscally responsible, as are all boards responsible throughout the province. We will continue to work with the board to make sure that their plan is achievable in first getting rid of any deficit and then dealing with any accumulated debt. They have a plan in place. We expect them to carry it out.

2:20

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit today that he will provide new funding to the Calgary board of education so that they can not only address the recommendations made by commissioner but also begin to pay the debt down?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we made that commitment in the budget delivered by the hon. Treasurer on 11 March of this year. That commitment is for \$600 million over the next three years. That's a significant amount. That includes money that will be for the enrollment growth that is expected in cities like Calgary. It will include increases to the basic instructional grant rate.

It will mean, Mr. Speaker, that a great deal of resources of this province are being dedicated to our top priority, which is the education of students in the province of Alberta.

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

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know from the climate change process that is under way that transportation accounts for 27 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. At the recent Alberta roundtable on climate change held in Edmonton, which I attended, the federal Minister of the Environment said that Ottawa will not – and I repeat, will not – impose a carbon tax. Can the Minister of Transportation and Utilities tell us if there was any discussion about increasing fuel taxes at the recent council of transportation ministers meeting?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Yes, the issue of fuel tax increase was discussed. Indeed fuel tax increase has been suggested as part of the transportation roundtable that is involved in climate change discussions. In fact, the transportation people have indicated that a fuel tax must be seriously looked at as part of the overall review and part of the overall discussion. They have also indicated that though there will be no additional carbon tax increase in the process, fuel tax is being considered as something entirely different.

The difficulty is that it's a very simple solution to add a tax. What it does in fact is take away any possible creativity to finding other

possible solutions that may be able to address the serious problem of greenhouse emissions that indeed are properly recognized. In the discussions at the table the numbers that have been bandied about are somewhere in the area of a 3- to 4-cent increase per year for 10 years, which would be a significant increase in the long term. It amounts to 30 to 40 cents per litre, which indeed is very, very significant.

MR. JOHNSON: With that information, then, can the minister please give the Assembly more details on what Alberta's position is on fuel taxes as they relate to climate change?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Our position is certainly to oppose the imposition of a fuel tax. That's something that we feel is not the way to go. We feel that there are creative ways of dealing with the issue. We feel that there are opportunities that indeed research and technology can develop that allow us to deal with this particular issue.

We certainly are concerned about the issue of greenhouse gases and realize that they have to be dealt with, but there are ways of dealing with it other than just the simple imposition of fuel tax. For example, designing and developing engine efficiency is something that's very key. Using different types of fuels that are coming forward will allow for less emissions, the implementation of an intelligent transportation strategy. Certainly tying in all of the light changes stops the effort of acceleration, which is known as the time when the greatest emissions take place. These are all ways of dealing with issues that can have a significant impact on greenhouse emissions.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the same minister. Can he please advise what Alberta's position is on toll roads on our national highway system, which I understand was also discussed at the same meeting?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Alberta has always had a very clear position as far as toll roads are concerned, and that is that existing roads will not be subject to tolls. The only possible use of toll roads would be as an alternative or an option.

Tolls, of course, were being discussed also in light of greenhouse emissions, certainly the idea being that there should be ways found to curtail traffic on the roads. Indeed that would have some major economic impacts. Alberta's position basically is that there has to be a risk assessment, a cost-benefit analysis done before any decisions are made. We remain in that position, and it's our objective to see that any decisions are made on the basis of fact and not anticipation.

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

Calgary Teachers' Collective Bargaining

(continued)

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report prepared by the disputes inquiry board regarding the dispute between the Calgary teachers and the Calgary board of education is clear that the issue of inadequate government funding is the central issue in the dispute. Calgary teachers not only want fair compensation, but they want a government to help them protect class sizes and special-needs children. Everyone deserves a second chance. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Given that the government's own disputes inquiry board has joined with parents, teachers, and trustees

in identifying government funding as a major concern for the Calgary board of education, will the minister now take steps to address their very important concerns?

Thank you.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to take issue with the original comment that was made by the hon. member with respect to classroom size. That is not what the union in Calgary has been advocating. What they're interested in advocating is the pupil/teacher ratio, which has nothing to do with classroom size. I note with a great deal of interest that the disputes inquiry board's report did not comment on the issue of classroom size even once. It does comment on pupil/teacher ratio, but it does not comment on classroom size.

If the hon. member was in fact interested in protecting classroom size, he would look very carefully at the offer that is being put forward by the Calgary board in the case of the Calgary board of education's negotiations with their union, and what he'll find, Mr. Speaker, is that the Calgary board is offering a cap on classroom size: 26 students at the elementary level, 28 at junior high, 30 at the senior high level. That combined with a 10 percent offer of salary increase over the next three years I think is a very generous offer by the Calgary board of education.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is also to the Minister of Education. Given that the government has ignored thousands of Calgary parents who have signed petitions, won't listen to the Calgary board of education trustees, won't listen to the Alberta Teachers' Association, which represents teachers on the front lines, won't even listen to members of their own caucus, how exactly is this government going to solve this problem? Who are you listening to, Minister of Education?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I meet with many people. The hon. member knows that. I meet with trustees. I meet with parents. I meet with students. I meet with administrators. I meet with school superintendents. There is a great number of people that have made very constructive criticisms of the operations of this government in the Department of Education, and I always pay attention to constructive criticism. Beyond that I won't comment any further on this hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that parents, teachers, and trustees in Calgary all need the government's help to resolve this dispute but all we hear from the minister is rhetoric and empty promises, where does the minister expect Calgary teachers to go to get the resources to best educate our children?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Calgary board of education has a global budget somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$560 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. MAR: Five hundred and sixty million dollars. That's a significant amount of money, Mr. Speaker. Out of that we expect the board to be able to negotiate with its teachers in good faith.

2:30

I agree with the hon. member when he says that teachers should be remunerated fairly and that they deserve a fair increase. I agree with that. But, Mr. Speaker, I have to say that with other school boards that have also put in place through the negotiation process fair increases for their teachers, they've managed to do it within the

same instructional grants that we give to the Calgary board of education. That is the answer to his question. Teachers will be remunerated out of the better than half billion dollars that the Calgary board of education has in its control.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Internet Access for Schools

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are about the implementation of technology in education. As the implementation of the information and communication technology program goes forward, some rural schools in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan report that there are band width inequities between rural and urban schools. Schools in the urban areas are able to obtain high band width and therefore are able to access the Internet easily, whereas in rural areas there are not as many computers able to access the Internet. My question is to the Minister of Education. Can he explain what actions his department is taking to provide appropriate Internet access for all of our schools?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I want to say at the outset that technology is not just an add-on to our education system. It is an integral part of it. Accordingly the band width issue is an important one, and it's something we take seriously. We've worked with a number of partners on this dealing with band width issues: the Department of Public Works, Supply and Services, major vendors of services such as Shaw and Telus, network integrators like Systemhouse. What we're trying to do in working on projects with these partners is trying to find the best and most cost-effective solutions to meeting the technology needs of students, regardless of where they are in the province of Alberta.

Maybe, Mr. Speaker, I'll just add this finally. We are looking at a number of innovative funding proposals that school boards have put forward. I think they're exciting. They've been submitted to the department and are currently being reviewed, and lastly we are working with the Chief Information Officers' Council to find collective solutions for the band width issue that exists, not just in the Department of Education but also with other departments such as Health, Social Services, Community Development, and Municipal Affairs.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can he explain how much funding he has provided to schools for technology integration, including software and hardware and networking components?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all, in 1995-96 we spent \$5 million making sure that there was a network access grant given to school jurisdictions so that every school could be connected to the Internet. Secondly, \$85 million were committed for the years between 1996-97 and 2000-2001 for the acquisition of hardware and instructional software and networking components.

In our new business plan, Mr. Speaker, it's our intention to continue to provide \$20 million a year in technology funding into the year 2001-2002. Finally, our increase in the basic instructional grant rate, which will take place, first of all, 3 percent in September of this year, 2 percent in the year following that, and 2 percent in the year following that – those funds that go to the basic instructional grant rate will help all aspects of instruction, including teachers and learning resources. School boards, of course, always used a portion

of that basic instructional grant for covering the cost of instructional technology.

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: to overcome some of these band width challenges, would it be possible to create high-speed network connections to some of the rural areas of the province, perhaps a joint venture with private industry, using links for school and government offices and hospitals perhaps? I wonder if this would also qualify for innovative funding that's available.

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a proven record of partnerships for finding cost-effective solutions that address the technology needs of our school boards. Wherever possible, pilot projects will be explored to determine where shared networks are useful and how best to implement them. Certainly the hon. member makes a good suggestion, something that we'd like to continue to work on, working with partnerships such as the Alberta government data network in Grande Yellowhead, where we've involved partners from the Department of Community Development, the Edson library, and also Advanced Education. I think that that would be a very prudent suggestion.

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

Advanced Education Funding

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week the University of Calgary Faculty Association released a survey of department heads and deans that outlined the pressures and problems associated with funding cuts by the government. It showed an increase of 50 to 100 percent in class size, concerns about quality education, decaying infrastructure, overworked faculty, and staff retention and recruitment problems. At the U of C convocation just last Thursday a former chancellor lambasted this government for the alarming deterioration in the library facility. My question this afternoon is to the Minister of Advanced Education and Career Development, and it's simply this: what remedial action will this government take?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, it was a rather interesting situation to be involved in, to be there to represent of course the government of Alberta and then to hear the remarks of the esteemed gentleman. I talked to him later on in the day and indicated to him that I appreciated his remarks, that certainly as a minister of this government and the minister directly responsible I had to hear these things, and that this was excellent feedback.

I'd like to just indicate to the hon. member and to other members here in the House that Advanced Education and Career Development and therefore the University of Calgary, like all others, made their contribution toward ridding this province of deficits and now are working very strongly toward ridding this province of debt. I'd like to congratulate all the members in the postsecondary system. They took 21 percent cuts, yet over the same period of time actually increased enrollment by 7 percent. So by any math curricula that you'd want to bring forward in this province, we have just a tremendous increase in productivity.

Now we move forward into the future. Of course the University of Calgary has been mentioned in the particular question. That is right in the centre of tremendous growth. We know, hon. member, that over time we're going to have to respond to those growth pressures, and we will. We have shown consistently that where there have been pressures in our system, we've responded. The

Department of Education has come up with \$600 million that they're putting into their system, Health is responding, and certainly Advanced Education will respond as well.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, my follow-up question would be this: will this minister immediately review and adjust the funding formula to prevent a first-class university from becoming cash strangled? That's the direction we're headed, Mr. Minister.

MR. DUNFORD: As a matter of fact, I'm pleased to report to the hon. member that we've done just that. We've added access funding in our current business plan, which I'm sure the hon. member knows. Anyone that has taken the time to investigate that funding envelope will see that for programming as it deals with growth, we've actually moved toward a funding formula.

What we haven't done, though, is view the whole system in a manner perhaps similar to Education in terms of funding by FLE. What you find of course in a postsecondary system is that it's much different than just the basic K to 12. There's a myriad of options that Albertans can pick and choose from. So we feel that the traditional way of funding programming in our postsecondary institutions by program and by responding to the proposals that the individual institutions send us – these proposals are based on actual costs that they expect to incur. We then can respond to the system.

I think that by all accounts, hon. member – and you know this yourself being a member from Calgary – the University of Calgary is a very strong postsecondary institution, and of course it's part of a very strong postsecondary system that we have here in Alberta.

2:40

MR. DICKSON: My final question, back to the same minister, is: given the recent announcement of the federal millennium grant, will this minister commit this afternoon that the funding will not be taken away dollar for dollar from provincial funding in view of qualification?

MR. DUNFORD: One of the things we're very proud of in Alberta is that when the discussion first came up about the Canada millennium scholarship, Alberta was one of the first provinces to indicate to the hon. minister – and I have to assume, although I don't know this, that he probably relayed that on to the Prime Minister himself – that they needn't worry about Alberta getting caught up in any sort of constitutional argument, that here in Alberta we would not stand between students and money. I think we're very proud, then, that this government has been able to keep that commitment as far as the Canada millennium scholarship is concerned.

What we have been talking to students about – and we're looking for input from the various stakeholder groups – is now, in the second, third, and fourth years, as the millennium scholarship moves in and starts to move aside some of the provincial dollars, how are we going to reinvest those dollars in the system? So I would invite you, hon. member, to be like any other Albertan. You're welcome to submit your good ideas, and of course we'll certainly have a look at them in due course.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

School Building Utilization

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, recently I attended a meeting with parents in my constituency to discuss the Calgary board of education's learning environment action plan, or LEAP. The report, which is supposed to be released by the CBE at the end

of this month, will make recommendations on how to proceed on school facilities and student accommodation for the future in Calgary. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Can the minister explain to the House if the LEAP report can assist the CBE in its proposal to the province to build new schools in Calgary?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, the LEAP report is one of the things that emerged as a result of the Calgary board of education's review. I think it was recognized by all parties involved that the issue of student accommodation was a serious issue with the Calgary board of education for two reasons. One is because there were underutilized facilities in some parts of the city and, number two, that there are not schools located in places where students actually are in some of the faster growth areas of the city. I think that the LEAP report is a very good step, a step in the right direction, and is reflective of the Calgary board's genuine intention to work with parents to come up with a solution to dealing with student accommodation. So I think it will be an important part of their long-term plan.

The LEAP report hopefully will give trustees the recommendations that they need for improving the board's overall utilization rate, which can assist them in improving their chances for new school construction being approved by the Department of Education's school buildings branch. I expect, Mr. Speaker, that the LEAP report will also signal that the board is interested in working with its parents in a very collaborative fashion and dealing hopefully not just with the student accommodation issue but other issues that will come up from time to time with the operations of the Calgary board.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, can the minister indicate what other options the CBE has besides school closures?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the LEAP report will give CBE trustees directions on long-term plans for schools, but as an alternative to closing schools, the Calgary board might consider, as an example, leasing portions of a school to appropriate groups, such as nonprofits or local organizations, local government departments, and even charter schools. The Calgary board of education needs a good accommodation plan that will improve its overall utilization rate, which again will help the board in gaining approval for new school construction.

The benefit of leasing out space is that our school board qualifies for additional space exemptions from the province. One example, Mr. Speaker, of where that's happened is in the case of Victoria school. The Victoria community school has leased its excess space out to a charter school, a local food bank, a Japanese school, and a school board for continuing education. These are innovative ways that the board can deal with its excess space and improve its utilization rate, thereby qualifying the school for new capital construction.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, given that some of the discussion at the LEAP meeting I attended surrounded the use of multi-use facilities between public and separate school districts and with the community, can the minister provide any examples of how this has worked in other school jurisdictions in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, there are good examples that exist in this province, as well as in other provinces, where there have been collaborative efforts made. The deputy Leader of the Opposition asked about this in his question. I want to reiterate that it is possible to maintain the integrity of the Catholic education system but still leave room for collaboration and co-ordination of services and facilities. G.H. Dawe school in the city of Red Deer is an example

of an elementary school that has a public wing and a Catholic wing. Interestingly, at the end of every two years they switch ends. I think that's a very good use of public dollars. They have a common core of administration offices, a library, a gymnasium, but they do have two different wings.

In other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker, I'm familiar with schools in the province of Ontario; for example, the Sutton multi-use facility, which is located in Georgina, Ontario. It has shared facilities: a gymnasium, library, cafeteria, music room, science room, swimming pool, outdoor tracks. A local church uses its parking lot during school hours, and the financing of that particular facility was also quite unique.

There are other things that we can do, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the sharing of facilities, joint-use facilities, to make sure that schools are not simply buildings that are open 10 hours a day, 190 days a year, but in fact they're open 20 hours a day, 360 days a year.

head: Statement by the Speaker

1999 Page Speech Competition

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, prior to asking the Clerk to proceed with the next item on Routine, members may recall that on May 6 a press release was issued announcing the winners of the fifth annual Speaker's Cup page speech competition. This competition, sponsored by TransAlta corporation, is designed to broaden the pages' knowledge of parliamentary government and assist in the development of their ability to communicate orally.

The topic chosen for this year's competition was: How Can the Commonwealth Assist in the Protection and Development of National and Regional Cultures in the Face of Increasingly Globalized Communications and Entertainment? The first-place winner was Daniel Novak, who I am proud to say has agreed to give his speech to the hon. members of this Assembly in this Chamber, where countless words of wisdom have been spoken since the first official sitting on Thursday, November 30, 1911.

But for this event to take place, we need the permission of the Assembly to deviate slightly from our routine. I therefore will ask all hon. members if they are in favour of granting unanimous consent to allow grade 10 student Daniel Novak to give his 1999 page speech competition award-winning speech to us. Those in favour, please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. Thank you.

I would now invite Daniel Novak to come forward and repeat the speech that won him first place in the fifth annual Speaker's cup page speech competition.

2:50 Membrane of the Commonwealth

MR. NOVAK: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Human Culture is the art of revealing to a man the true idea of his being, his endowments, his possessions, and of fitting him to use these for the growth, renewal, and perfection of his spirit. It is the art of completing a man.

These wise words of Bronson Alcott ring true even today as countries struggle to maintain their cultures in the face of an ever shrinking global village. Regional cultures more and more are fighting to keep their own identity while Americanized programming threatens to drag our diverse world into a final melting pot of conformity.

A couple of days ago I was sitting in biology class, captivated as usual, and I was thinking about this topic, so I thought: what is a

region or a country? It's a lot like a cell, and the Commonwealth, well, that's the organ, the link between all the cells, and the rest of the body, well, that's the world.

But recently the cell membranes have become damaged. They have been bombarded with material from the outside. Now, normally membranes would regulate what enters and exits the cells and protect the genetic material inside, the cells' individuality. As a result, each cell's individuality is threatened, and the onus falls upon the controlling structure, the organ, to restore its cells' individuality and retain their diversity. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker, the Commonwealth must protect its members' own cultures, and we must accomplish this through three mediums: social, political, and economic.

The first step that the Commonwealth must take is to advance the social programs of that nation. A nation, like a cell, cannot function properly and cannot maintain its individuality without its specific parts: its power source, its transport system, its repair centre. The same is true with a country. It needs its education system and its guards against starvation and disease. Only then can the country protect and develop its identity. The Commonwealth must aid in the protection of social programs. The best and most simple way to do this is to develop a system where its members are linked and share their information. Just like cells the whole strengthens the one. The Commonwealth must link its members together so that they strengthen one another. Once the country's social programs are in order, the country's ability to maintain its own individuality will be on the mend. Part of the cell will be restored.

The second step that the Commonwealth must take is that of politics. The government of a nation is like a nucleus. Without it a country doesn't even have a chance of surviving, much less maintaining its culture. But we see nations in danger everywhere because they don't have an active government or a fair justice system. The Commonwealth is once again summoned to the forefront to solve these problems, and once again the solution lies in the sharing of knowledge between the members. However, now the Commonwealth must take a more active approach. Countries with an active government, such as Britain and Canada, must work with other countries to achieve a strong proactive government that guards against the predominant entrance of American programming and that promotes the individuality of that culture. With a strong government in place, the nucleus will be restored and that country, that cell, will once again be strengthened.

The third area that the Commonwealth must develop in order to protect national and regional cultures is that of economics. An organ must regulate what enters and what exits itself. Similarly, the Commonwealth must take an active role in ensuring that its members are economically secure. Countries with scattered foreign economic trade policy cannot possibly regulate their communications and entertainment and maintain their culture. The Commonwealth must not only link knowledge and share ideas between nations, but new programs must be enacted to guard nations against the globalization of communications and entertainment. The Commonwealth must work to achieve trade tariffs and free trade agreements in those countries. Only then, when that country is strong and independent, will they finally be able to protect and develop their culture. Once the country's social, political, and economic sectors are developed, then the country can advance its culture against globalization. The cell's membrane will be repaired, and the cell's individuality will be protected.

Throughout the Commonwealth's actions there are certain dangers that must be observed. It is paramount that the Commonwealth not fund arts or entertainment of the country directly, not simply because it is he who pays the piper that calls the tune but because culture

must develop naturally, without direct interference. To do otherwise would defeat the purpose of the plan.

The Commonwealth is a powerful organization both historically and in modern times, and today it must rise to the challenge and provide for nations their own means of developing their own culture. By restoring the social, political, and economic portions of the cell, then the cell membranes will be repaired and the cell's individuality will flourish. Then, Mr. Speaker, the Commonwealth, the heart, will once again be strong. [applause]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Daniel. You've become the third person in the history of this Legislative Assembly to have been invited to speak on the floor of this Assembly. The other two individuals were Winnifred Stewart in the early 1950s and then several years ago Rick Hansen. You are now the third.

I want to congratulate you again on being the recipient of the 1999 award for the page speaking competition, but I also want to thank you personally for now allowing me to use your name in the future as a model for parliamentary debate and participation in this particular Assembly in terms of acuity, to the point and the like.

To the Minister of Education and to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, I think most of the 500,000 young people in the province of Alberta fit the model, the model that we've got here in this Assembly with our pages and the like, and we should be rightfully proud.

I would also like all hon. members to know that this is the last day for Simone Godbout, our head page. All hon. members may also wish to know that Simone has now become the third Albertan to have been accepted into the House of Commons page program in Ottawa, and she'll begin there in the 1999 fall sitting of the House. While in Ottawa she'll also be attending Ottawa University. Simone, all the best.

Hon. members, I also want you to thank all the pages, who have served us very, very well. The hon. Deputy Speaker will be providing mementos for you later. [applause]

So we'll now pause for 30 seconds, and then we'll proceed with Members' Statements.

head: Members' Statement

3:00

Travis Dhanraj

MR. SHARIF: Mr. Speaker, on March 13, 1999, a conference titled Northeast Cares: Open Your Heart – Lend a Hand was hosted in my constituency. This initiative, organized by Rose Lamoureux, a community social worker, was a gathering of youth, adults, community residents, and public officials of northeast Calgary. My colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross and I had the privilege of attending this event. The conference provided an opportunity to our youth to brainstorm solutions on the issue of child poverty and to share their thoughts with adults. One of the speakers at this conference was Travis Dhanraj, who is seated in the members' gallery today.

As part of his humanities 20 social action project at Lester B. Pearson high school, Travis attempted to find an answer to the question: why in a nation as respected and wealthy as Canada are children living in poverty? In his search for the answer Travis turned to a quote from L. Masden:

To be born poor is to face a greater likelihood of ill health in infancy, in childhood and throughout your adult life. To be born poor is to face a lesser likelihood that you will finish high school; lesser still that you will attend university. To be born poor is to face a greater likelihood that you will be judged as a delinquent in adolescence, and, if so, a greater likelihood that you will be sent to

a correctional institution. To be born poor is to have a low self-esteem, to feel that you are less than others. To be born poor is to have the deck stacked against you at birth, to find an uphill struggle ever after. To be born poor is unfair.

Travis has certainly contributed to the awareness of the day-to-day problems faced by children living in poverty. Travis is also volunteering for NUTV, which is the University of Calgary's television station, and hopes to produce a documentary on child poverty.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my colleagues in the Alberta Legislature I commend Travis for undertaking such an emotionally charged subject, and I wish him the very best in his endeavor. As the MLA for Calgary-McCall I salute Travis for his initiative and for being an ambassador for northeast Calgary. Keep up the good work, Travis.

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

Funding for Midwifery

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to address the issue of funding of midwifery through the medicare program, a policy the government has yet to adopt. I was the researcher for the late Grant Notley and for Ray Martin when Sandra Botting first approached us to see if we would support the midwives in their campaign to, first of all, obtain legal status in the province and, secondly, to obtain the funding that they require through the medicare program. I remember writing questions for question period for both Grant and Ray on this subject and also comments for their bill notes.

I'm sorry to report to the Assembly that Sandra Botting passed away a week ago. She was a fabulous advocate for midwifery. One of the cases that she always made so powerfully was that this is about a health care choice and particularly a woman's health care choice, that modern medicine and science don't always have all the answers and that pregnancy and childbirth are not illnesses; they are natural conditions of evolution of the species.

I'd like to point out that last week or the week before the Premier was mentioning that funding was never part of the issue. I need to correct the record. Funding through medicare was always part of the issue. I have been in this building a long time, and I may be short, but my memory is long. I can find the *Hansards* if anybody needs the proof. Like I say, this is going back to 1983. I know myself that I asked questions of the health care minister in 1986 to 1989 as the health critic for the Official Opposition New Democrats.

I urge the government to reconsider its position, perhaps not a fee for service but perhaps some form of grant that could go directly to midwives so that those women who choose not to have their pregnancy and childbirth treated as a disease in a hospital can have the choice they truly deserve.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

Singing *O Canada* in Schools

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From Kosovo and Belgrade to Littleton, Colorado, and Taber, Alberta, the people of Canada have responded to the images and stories of conflict and human misery with sadness, horror, courage, and determination. Out of tragedy we hope that some good may come so that the losses suffered by so many are not in vain. Consequently, tragedies such as these often lead us to reflect on questions of who we are now as a society and as individuals and where we are headed in the future.

For the past year myself and several colleagues have been seeking

to define who we are as Canadians. We share a strong commitment to the welfare of Canada and a sense of pride in this country we call home. We wish to encourage and enhance the sense of love and commitment for our nation, and we believe one way to achieve this is to facilitate the singing of *O Canada* on a daily basis in our elementary schools. We hope that a few moments a day reflecting with reverence on the beauty of Canada's human and natural resources will encourage our young people to consider this a citizen's responsibility not only to their country but also the diverse group of people who together form Canada. We believe understanding and appreciating the rights and privileges that this nation offers all of its peoples will indeed give our young citizens the courage to stand on guard for the protection and furthering of Canada's dearly held values and principles.

Mr. Speaker, we believe the singing of *O Canada* on a regular basis encourages pride, commitment, and hope in the future of our country, and I respectfully request that this legislative body consider the impact this small act can have on the health and well-being of Canada and all of her peoples now and into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's Ruling Points of Order

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have notices that four-plus hon. members want to rise and participate in points of order. There is some anticipation as we arrive at this particular day that this particular legislative session may terminate in the next several days. I don't want to see the afternoon spent haggling over points of order. What I'm going to do is take my own initiative, and I'm going to rule on these points of order before even having heard these points of order, having attended to and having listened to, so that we can get on with the business of private members which is scheduled for this afternoon. So just bear with me, and if you don't agree with what I say, at the conclusion I'll still recognize the hon. members with respect to these various points of order.

Speaker's Ruling Allegations against a Member

THE SPEAKER: First of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* rose on a point of order that I can best attribute to something that was dealt with by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General in terms of a tabling. In essence, I would suspect that the hon. Member for Calgary-*Buffalo* would probably be saying that the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General had made some statements attributed to the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Norwood* and attributed them to the letter from various prison guards.

The chair has reviewed the letter and the tabling. The quote used by the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General is in the letter, and there's nothing unparliamentary per se, but members should not be allowed to do indirectly what they cannot do directly in this Assembly, and that is make allegations. In other words, if an hon. member stands up and says, "I accuse you of something in this House," that is a direct accusation, and the court will convene and deal with the matter.

It is incorrect and inappropriate to take a letter and file it and then quote from that letter and say that this is attributed to an hon. member. Nothing unparliamentary in the language that was used. The point here is that members should not be allowed to do indirectly what they cannot do directly.

This Assembly of Alberta is very, very unique in allowing so many tablings with respect to the content, but never, ever, ever in the history of Alberta, going back to 1905, were documents containing personal allegations acceptable. That offends the historical propri-

eties of this particular Assembly, and I want to make that very, very clear with respect to that.

Members might want to review, as we go through the next number of months, the rules concerning petitions, which are documents that are presented in this particular Assembly, and I particularly want to refer members to paragraphs 1029(2) and (3) of *Beauchesne*. The practice that we saw today about tabling letters that have allegations about other people in an indirect way is not to be continued in this particular Assembly.

Speaker's Ruling Allegations against a Member

THE SPEAKER: Now, on the same point of tablings. I do believe that the Minister of Family and Social Services would want to rise on a particular tabling. This also deals with a point of order and has to do with a tabling by the Member for Edmonton-*Riverview* dated May 17. Please remember, hon members, these tablings go to the chair. They go to the Speaker. That's who the tablings are for. So if something erroneous is being tabled with me, then I'll have to deal with it. That's who will deal with it in the Assembly.

3:10

The tabling provided by the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Riverview* accuses the Minister of Family and Social Services of not tabling responses to motions for returns 12 and 13. This member is wrong, and the member did not have the courtesy to copy the minister in question. The responses were clearly tabled on May 10, 1999, and are sessional papers 766/99 and 767/99.

The Member for Edmonton-*Riverview* has made unfounded and erroneous allegations under the guise of tabling a personal letter to the Speaker. That is not good. That in fact is a great sin in this Assembly. Common decency would dictate that the hon. member do the honourable thing and apologize at the appropriate time.

Speaker's Ruling Parliamentary Language

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-*Mill Woods* would rise on a point of order, caught my eye on a point of order, and I believe the hon. member would be responding to the hon. Minister of Education when the hon. Minister of Education accused the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Mill Woods* of telling half-truths. I believe that would be the gist of it, and then the Minister of Education further went on to suggest that the hon. Member for Edmonton-*Mill Woods* had been speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

There's no doubt at all that *Beauchesne* gives a lot of room with respect to context, but the basic rule is that one member cannot accuse another member of uttering a deliberate falsehood. I mean, our rules clearly prohibit that, clearly, clearly say things like that when people want to use words like lie, which was not used today, and various forms of half-truths have been found to be unparliamentary.

While the specific expression is not found in *Beauchesne* from 489 to 492, one should take a look at the dictionary. The hon. Minister of Education oftentimes uses words in the context of definitions of those words in this House; he's done it in the past. He's seemed to have had a personal competition with another member of Executive Council to see who can inject a certain word. So the Minister of Education is a man who understands what the dictionary is and the meaning of the words in the dictionary.

So one would then look at the dictionary and see what "half-truth" means. Basically, if you want to look at *Webster's* dictionary, *Webster's* dictionary, going back to the year 1658, suggests that

there is a multiplicity of meanings for the word half-truth. One is “a statement that is only partially true.” The second one is “a statement that mingles truth and falsehood with deliberate intent to deceive.” So if the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods takes the second definition to heart, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods truly does have a point of order. If, on the other hand, the hon. Minister of Education was taking the first one, then there is some grayness with respect to this.

All I’m saying here is that if there are learned people in this Assembly who want to use the dictionary and want to quote from the dictionary, then they should darn well learn what the definitions are and afford themselves accordingly, but recognize that this is towards the end of a session and there’s some degree of enthusiasm that it seems to exhibit.

Speaker’s Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Now, hon. Member for Little Bow, I believe you were catching my eye, and you were probably going to make the statement that you couldn’t really hear the answers to all of the questions. I think I dealt with that earlier when I brought to the attention of all members of the Assembly that there were options to interjections in this Assembly: go visit the birds tomorrow morning or be quiet for a period of time.

So I think I’ve dealt with the four purported points of order, and hopefully you will subscribe to my – I’m going to be presumptuous in thinking that I believe those were the points of order that would be dealt with, but I think I’ve dealt with them all. Clearly there were things that were not in the best behaviour of hon. members in this Assembly today. So I’m going to sit down, unless somebody wants to continue the points of order business.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I was going to thank you for the way you addressed these today and for your direct responses. I’d just be anxious, sir, that it not be a precedent that in the future we’d not be entitled to make our specific points of order from time to time as they arise. But I appreciate what you’ve done this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Standing Orders provide for questions from hon. members and opportunities for the chair to respond to them. This most certainly is not a precedent, hon. members, not at all in fact. I’ve said that I would give an opportunity to hon. members to participate later. But this is private members’ day, and if the chair has one responsibility, it’s to protect the interests of private members. If private members themselves want to filibuster private members’ opportunities to points of order, that’s another thing. I don’t think that’s the honourable thing to do.

We’re now going to proceed with private members’ day.

head: Orders of the Day

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

head: Second Reading

Bill 210 Charitable Donation of Food Act

[Adjourned debate May 12: Mrs. Laing]

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

MRS. O’NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise today to join my colleague the Member for Calgary-Bow in support

of Bill 210, the Charitable Donation of Food Act. Bill 210 is truly a timely and well considered piece of legislation with many positive benefits for Albertans. I would also like to commend the Member for Calgary-Bow on the consultative work she has done to prepare for the introduction of Bill 210. As we have seen, she has sought and received the support of some very important stakeholder groups involved in the donation of food and the operation of food banks. Clearly this sort of support and encouragement is needed when dealing with legislation that impacts the lives of less fortunate Albertans.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

An examination of Bill 210 shows that its impact will be positive. We will see donations of food to food banks increasing. We will see a much better selection of food, including fruits, vegetables, and dairy products, available at food banks. These are worthwhile initiatives that I support and that I would urge all members of this Assembly to support as well.

I recognize that there likely will be some concerns raised with legislation such as this. For the benefit of the members of this Assembly or the public who may be concerned with Bill 210, I have listed a number of them. It has been suggested that Bill 210 would create two standards of food, one for the rich and one for the poor. Some may say that while it is not acceptable for those who can afford to buy groceries to buy groceries past their sell-by date, it is okay for those who can’t afford their groceries to consume products past their sell-by date. I believe that this assertion is both inaccurate and potentially misleading.

Of course, Madam Speaker, all of us have likely consumed milk or other dairy products from our fridge that are past their sell-by dates. However, that is not really the issue here. In many cases food products become passed over on grocery shelves even though they may still be before their sell-by date. Products with the very latest sell-by date get purchased until the next shipment comes out, with a later date. Many products get repeatedly passed over until they spoil or they have to be thrown away to make room on the shelf for newer products. Instead of letting milk and other products age unpurchased on the shelf, they could be donated to food banks as well, as later dated products come out to replace them. Then those still safe to consume products would be available to people who could really use them.

Others might suggest that Bill 210 would encourage donors or distributors of donated food to be less vigilant with regard to food safety. Bill 210 only eliminates the possibility of legal liability for people who in good faith make donations of food they know and believe to be fit for human consumption. As section 2 of Bill 210 points out, a person or company “is not liable . . . unless the food was adulterated, rotten or otherwise unfit for human consumption” at the time of donation or distribution.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, there is no protection from liability for persons or companies who act “with reckless disregard for the safety of others.” Although it is up to the courts to determine liability on a case-by-case basis, it could be determined that food donors or distributors who do not take all appropriate measures to ensure the safety of food could be acting “with reckless disregard.”

3:20

Madam Speaker, as we know, food banks are already safe food storage places, carefully regulated and inspected by their local regional health authority. Moreover, food banks must comply with the food service, nuisance, and general sanitation regulations of the Public Health Act. According to the Public Health Act, food banks

must maintain the same food-handling standards of any other food distribution organization, whether it be a restaurant or a grocery store. Moreover, the nuisance and general sanitation regulations prohibit any action that threatens or has the potential to threaten public health. Bill 210 does not weaken a food bank's commitment to these regulations.

As well, many food banks have required their volunteers to take the provincial food-handling course before working with food products. Each one of them is very concerned about their reputation as well as the health and welfare of their clientele. I would encourage this vigilant and cautious attitude to continue and for all food banks to require their volunteers to be trained in food-handling safety.

As you can see, concerns with food quality are clearly addressed by existing regulations and legislation. Bill 210 does not in any way open the door to relaxed standards of care and does not welcome careless or reckless behaviour. Moreover, when examining the benefits of Good Samaritan legislation, it becomes very clear that the passage of Bill 210 is beneficial and necessary for individuals who rely on food banks to put food on their table.

It has already been mentioned in this Assembly that Bill 210 will open the door to increased and more diverse donations of food to food banks. I would not suggest that Albertans do not donate enough food to food banks. Nothing could be further from the truth. Albertans' spirit of giving and generosity is well documented and recognized throughout our country. During the Christmas holiday season thousands of organizations, families, companies, and charitable groups organize a collection of food for their local food bank. Individual donations to food banks also increase at a tremendous rate during this season. However, donations at other times of the year are not as strong even though the demand on food banks is consistent throughout the year. Many food banks are forced to carefully limit distributions to individuals to ensure that there will be some food available for anyone who needs it.

Bill 210 would open the door for steady donations from companies like grocery stores who have a constant supply of high-quality surplus food that often gets disposed of. Many nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables, fresh meat, and dairy products are not donated because of their perishable status. Nonetheless, all of them are necessary components of a balanced diet. We want to ensure that all people, particularly children, eat balanced meals to grow, to maintain good health, and to learn.

Madam Speaker, Bill 210 is not the answer to the problem of poverty in Alberta. It is also not an indication that our government is unwilling to act to improve the employment and social prospects of less fortunate Albertans. Bill 210 simply recognizes that food banks are important and needed institutions for people in some communities. It also recognizes that a few simple steps can significantly improve the ability of a food bank to provide for the people who really need it.

I am happy to join with the Member for Calgary-Bow in support of this timely and necessary piece of legislation. It is well considered and supported by charitable organizations and food banks alike. I would urge my colleagues in the government caucus as well as the members of the Liberal and New Democrat opposition caucuses to join me in the speedy passage of Bill 210 now.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to close debate.

MRS. LAING: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to call the question at this time on second reading.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a second time]

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to seek unanimous consent of the House to move on to other business at this time, namely private members' motions.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader has asked that we give unanimous consent so that we can move on to business other than government business and private members' motions. Would all those in favour please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's carried. Oh, it isn't carried. It has to be unanimous.

Bill 211

Workers' Compensation (Competitive Marketplace Review Committee) Amendment Act, 1999

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

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Montrose I would like to move second reading of Bill 211.

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

MR. DICKSON: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the comment made by the Member for Medicine Hat, Madam Speaker.

MR. RENNER: I just moved second reading.

MR. DICKSON: That's fine. I'm prepared to let the matter go, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to speak to Bill 211. I think the whole concept of the Workers' Compensation Board and the question of whether the insurance program under the Workers' Compensation Board should be reviewed in the context of the private marketplace is a very, very interesting concept. I think the bill is being brought forward by the hon. member as an indication, really, of some of the frustrations that many members of the House have in their role, if I may put it, as ombudsmen. We have many of our constituents come to see us in our constituency offices on a regular basis to talk about their trials and tribulations with the Workers' Compensation Board.

While I think it is generally agreed that the Workers' Compensation Board does a fantastic job for injured workers in this province and has a very high approval rating, there is nonetheless a small group of workers in the province who feel like they are not appropriately dealt with by the system. The frustrations of those injured workers are brought to the attention of MLAs on a regular basis in

our constituency offices. Those frustrations are exhibited in a number of ways, some of which, I might say, have been hopefully corrected by recent changes to policy at the Workers' Compensation Board.

For example, the whole question of doctors' certificates and doctors' reviews and reports. At one time – I might say when I was in private practice – I had occasion on a number of occasions to have clients who had concerns with the compensation board, concerns about the fact that they were being referred to doctors for doctors' reports and that those doctors' reports may not necessarily agree with the complaints, the concerns, the health problems that were being suffered by the worker. Once that type of a negative report or a contrary report had been given, it was very, very difficult for a worker to overcome that report and to achieve the compensation which they desired. I might say that in many of my cases I agreed with the clients that they were entitled to compensation, but the difficulty of overcoming that type of a report was certainly there.

The changes in policy at the Workers' Compensation Board that we've seen recently, which has allowed people to go to an outside medical panel, I think have been a very, very effective way of dealing with that concern.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but the time limit for consideration of this item of business has expired.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions

Recognition of Seniors' Volunteerism

513. Ms Kryczka moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government during International Year of Older Persons and ensuing years to continue to recognize and support seniors who utilize their knowledge, experience, and skills by volunteering with organizations that provide a valuable community service to all ages.

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to begin debate on Motion 513. Perhaps one of the most pressing issues for myself today and for many of my constituents is the aging nature of our population. The need for us to plan for the short- and long-term needs of Albertans both young and old is becoming increasingly apparent. The focus is shifting towards initiatives that address the challenges we face in meeting both present and future needs at the provincial and federal levels.

3:30

To date one of the greatest steps taken toward recognizing the important and beneficial role seniors play in our society has been this year, 1999, the International Year of Older Persons. Just take a real look. All around us we see senior citizens giving their knowledge, time, and affection to others, whether through prolonged careers, volunteer work, or simply as family, friends, grandparents, and neighbours. I have witnessed firsthand the many wonderful contributions seniors make to our communities, and through my involvement on the long-term care review committee I have had the opportunity to address many of the health-related issues which seniors today and in the future will face.

I've also been honoured with chairing both the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta since being elected in 1997 and presently a cross-departmental study on the impact of the aging population, which will continue to carry out its activities over the next year. The

membership of the steering committee for this study includes representatives of seniors, members from the public at large, as well as representatives of the health, housing, active living, and community support sectors. The interim report to the minister responsible for seniors summarizes present government seniors' programs and services and proposes a number of recommendations on key issues. In October we will be holding public consultations across the province, and this will be followed in November by a seniors' symposium which will focus on the future in relation to changing demographics as well as government programs and services as they relate to seniors.

Madam Speaker, these involvements have provided me with many opportunities to meet seniors across Alberta to discuss issues that are of concern to them, to learn about their lifestyles, and has reaffirmed my belief that as our population ages, we must look to our communities for increased support. We must encourage intergenerational involvement while continuing to recognize the generous efforts of seniors.

My primary purpose for bringing forth this motion is to foster continued awareness and appreciation of the important role of seniors in society and encourage further support to seniors who utilize their knowledge, experience, and skills by volunteering. It is my hope that, through acceptance of this motion, volunteer efforts and organized activities which are made possible through the initiatives of the International Year of Older Persons will continue to be recognized and supported as an ongoing and integral part of communities across the province. In response to today's seniors and hence to our aging population, Madam Speaker, the continuation of IYOP initiatives brought forth by this motion is not only timely; it is essential and is currently a common theme for all societies around the globe.

The fact is the world's population is rapidly changing. Over the next few years the average life span worldwide will increase by almost 20 years. At the same time, the proportion of older persons, defined by the United Nations as 60 years of age and over, will increase from 1 in 14 to 1 in 4. In recognition of this significant demographic trend, the United Nations General Assembly did declare 1999 the International Year of Older Persons, or IYOP.

The seniors population is on the rise here in Canada as well and is actually among the fastest growing in the world. In Alberta seniors currently make up 10 percent of the population, and that number is expected to double in the next 15 to 20 years. As Alberta's current seniors population is now close to 300,000, we can expect growth to well over half a million by, say, 2016. This demographic shift will have an interesting effect on both our province and the world around us. We can expect that it will impact on families and communities and alter the economic, social, and cultural fabric of our society. The International Year of Older Persons has afforded us the opportunity to think about the coming changes and how we can respond to them as a society.

Canada's and Alberta's participation in the International Year of Older Persons has been designed to benefit our society as a whole by helping to dispel myths about aging, to reduce the fear of aging, and by promoting between generations a more realistic image of aging. It is also providing an opportunity for our communities to recognize and benefit from seniors' talents, energies, life experiences, and contributions to society.

The theme for this year, Towards a Society for All Ages, reflects the goal of increasing public awareness about the important role that older persons play in all walks of life. I believe that by accepting Motion 513, this legacy would be established as a permanent theme in communities across Alberta. Why wouldn't educational institutions continue with their activities that are designed to recognize the

value of seniors, of integration of seniors into their institutions and their programming? Why wouldn't library systems, museums, conferences, continuing education associations, and communities keep up their unique activities, some involving seniors and students, others just celebrations?

Madam Speaker, Alberta currently has among the best programs in Canada for seniors, and while an aging population does present some challenges, it's important to remember that it also brings many opportunities. We know that seniors are a dedicated group of volunteers and a significant consumer force. They have knowledge and experience that provide insight, and their contributions make our communities vibrant, diverse, and caring societies. We are very fortunate that the vast majority of Canadian seniors play a positive role in the lives of families and communities across the country, with 69 percent providing one or more types of assistance to spouses, children, grandchildren, friends, and neighbours.

Some seniors assist in the form of unpaid care to fellow seniors, despite the fact that most live independently and do not require help with daily tasks. Many people may be surprised to know that most Canadian seniors live at home with their spouses and only 7 percent of people age 65 and older live in care centres.

Some of the other ways in which seniors offer assistance may be by providing transportation, volunteering at a local school, organizing a community fund-raiser, leading a church choir, or helping a neighbour file his or her income tax return. Madam Speaker, I think we would all agree that these are certainly valued services that make our communities better places to live.

The volunteer efforts of seniors is an example of how they so generally give back to their communities. Overall, seniors dedicate approximately a half hour per day to volunteer work. Looking at the economic value of the volunteer work done by seniors, it is estimated at between \$764 million and \$2.3 billion annually. Almost a quarter of all Canadian seniors contribute some time each week as unpaid volunteers, and even more engage in other unpaid activities such as looking after children. As workforce demands increase, many families depend on grandparents for support in child care.

You can see, Madam Speaker, that the list is potentially endless. Even these few examples illustrate why it is important not only to recognize their significant service to our province but also to acknowledge that seniors are a vital force in providing child care and in reducing health care costs as caregivers to spouses, family, friends, and neighbours.

Madam Speaker, Alberta supports recognizing the significance of those who generously give back to their communities in many ways, and for this reason the Ministry of Community Development provides support to volunteer organizations across the province. This is a significant portion of the department's program delivery, particularly in the arts, recreation, sports, heritage, and cultural awareness sectors, which are dependent upon community volunteers.

3:40

Madam Speaker, our province has wholeheartedly embraced the spirit of the year and has focused many of its projects and activities for 1999 on themes that fit this special global celebration. However, aside from the initiatives by IYOP, Alberta has and will continue to support many positive initiatives and programs that have been taking place for years; for example, the annual provincial Senior Citizens' Week, which began in 1986 and is sponsored by the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta; the minister's senior services award, which annually recognizes outstanding volunteer efforts by two individuals and two organizations in the province. The Alberta Seniors Games, being held this year in the towns of Olds and Didsbury from July 25 to 28, provide Albertans 55 years of age and

over the opportunity to pursue greater levels of physical, social, intellectual, and creative achievements through friendly competition and participation.

Madam Speaker, the proposal brought forth by Motion 513 is expected to complement these existing programs and further increase our awareness about the important role seniors play in our lives. It is my intention to pursue examining a few of the wonderful programs that exist in other provinces. In Ontario, for example, knitting generations together is a provincewide intergenerational program which recruits older persons to work alongside teachers in classrooms, in child care, health care, and services to single mothers. Adopting this model would establish an additional support to existing services, and we would benefit from the knowledge and experience of the volunteers.

Another excellent example exists in New Brunswick, where seniors promote the positive aspects and potential of their regions through the provincial seniors goodwill ambassador program. By appointing goodwill ambassadors from all parts of the province for a two-year term, volunteers promote their province in their own country and in other places. They travel the province, country, and world to speak to schools, clubs, organizations, and businesses to promote their province. The seniors goodwill ambassadors submit a monthly report outlining the activities in which they have participated, and a monthly time commitment of approximately two to three hours per week is expected.

Madam Speaker, these are just a few examples of steps we should consider towards the expansion of provincewide programs that address the challenges of an aging population.

In closing, Madam Speaker, it has been my intention with the discussion of Motion 513 not only to focus on our present and future paths, but I also wanted to draw attention to the fact that Alberta seniors have made great contributions to the prosperity and growth of this province. Their devotion to family and community has been a wonderful example for all of us and is the foundation of our province's success. As seniors continue to make important contributions to Alberta, we know that we all benefit. From direct economic growth to the shaping of public policy, seniors bring the experience and wisdom accumulated through a lifetime of hard work to all they continue to do. Alberta is a better place for all of us because of our seniors.

I would strongly urge all members of this Assembly to encourage your constituents to continue to recognize and support the valuable volunteer services provided by seniors to their immediate families and communities this year and most definitely in years to come.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. The Member for Calgary-West has proposed an interesting motion, and it's one of those motions that of course will gain acceptance by many members of the Assembly in that it simply asks the government "to continue to recognize and support seniors who utilize their knowledge, experience, and skills." It also speaks to the tremendous spirit of volunteering and volunteerism in the province of Alberta and that many of our pioneers helped create that spirit. So as far as it goes, I can only add a heartfelt thank you to the seniors of this province and to the Member for Calgary-West for bringing this issue to the attention of all members of the Assembly.

That being said, I wonder what real practical impact such a motion will have. Will it actually reinstate seniors' benefits that were clawed back? No, it won't. Will it help those seniors who are

coping with having the rules changed during their retirement? No, it won't. Will it address the concern raised by seniors that they're now being forced to pay the most regressive kind of tax this province has, that being a health care premium? No, it won't do that. Will this motion provide quicker access to long-term care beds closer to the home communities of seniors? No, Madam Speaker, it won't accomplish that either. So while we can all take some pleasure in congratulating seniors and encourage the provincial government to acknowledge the contribution of seniors, I don't think we can take very much pleasure at all in this International Year of Older Persons in terms of what it is that government policy has done to seniors.

I would like to refer all members to a sessional paper, a document which actually I tabled in this Assembly last week. It's from a constituent of mine by the name of Mr. Eklund. Mr. Eklund wrote me back on April 27 to make the following points. He says that prior to 1994 as a senior he didn't have to pay health care premiums, and now he has to pay \$816 for him and his wife, \$816 a year. He says that prior to 1989 he didn't have to pay for ostomy supplies, and now their average cost per year is about \$120. Senior citizens' property tax reduction benefits, which were stopped in 1995 through Alberta Municipal Affairs, has now cost this senior couple an approximate \$650 per year because the government has canceled that benefit. In past years this senior couple enjoyed a utility rebate of approximately \$124. This was stopped in June of 1994 by this government.

The total average annual cost now is over \$1,800, the annualized cost to this senior couple who are living on a fixed income, who don't have a chance to go back and remake the decisions they made about saving and spending and what they would be doing with their money because they trusted that the government wouldn't change things when they were powerless to do anything about it. Last year it was \$1,810 it has cost this senior couple. The Eklunds are in their late 70s, Madam Speaker, and they're really not in a position to go and do a paper route or deliver flyers to get a couple of extra bucks so they can pick up these expenses. The lack of respect that has been shown to seniors and the insensitivity to their legitimate concerns I think speaks volumes about this government.

Mr. Eklund goes on to state in his letter that

"the government of the day" is certainly (riding high) "roller skating" to a very significant degree on the backs of seniors. What a farce – first they cut health care to the bone, and now like "saviors" they are giving it back to us bit by bit.

Mr. Eklund is not alone in these sentiments, and of course, Madam Speaker, there are seniors all over this province who are experiencing these same Alberta disadvantages.

I think it's commendable that we would pause to recognize the contribution that seniors make. I think there are many things in this province that we have to be proud of. I think Alberta continues to be a place of choice for many seniors and their families, but I think that's because of a loyalty to the land and to the people. I believe that's out of a spirit of self-reliance and an ability to get on in the face of adversity. It certainly isn't a tribute to the provincial government, and I don't think the government should be taking credit, as they often do, for the choices that seniors make. I've heard members of Executive Council defend seniors' policies by saying: well, it can't be so bad, because we have a net in-migration of senior citizens. But there can be many, many reasons for that, and I think again it's a tribute to the ability of our seniors to cope rather than it is a tribute to our government's policy direction.

So I will probably support Motion 513, and I'll support it knowing that what I'm doing is supporting the seniors of this province, the men and women who made this a place where I want to live and raise my family. I'll do it thinking about the seniors that I've met in

the West Edmonton Seniors organization and the seniors that I drop in and visit over at Crescent Place or in any of the lodges in the constituency, whether it be Canora or the Ortona lodge. Those men and women remind me constantly about what it is to live with dignity and why it is that it's important that we carry on certain traditions. I won't be supporting this motion because I think it's a tribute to the government; it is, after all, a tribute to Alberta seniors.

3:50

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Motion 513, a motion to continue to recognize older persons' contributions. I look on this motion very favourably as I recognize the value of the vast contributions of older persons in my constituency – that is, the Wetaskiwin-Camrose constituency – and indeed all around the province. My commendation goes out to the Member for Calgary-West for her initiative to further address a need in our province and bring forth this motion.

Madam Speaker, I believe this motion is another good example of the commitment that this government has to seniors and to ensuring their important place in our society. My colleague from Calgary-West has of course previously mentioned the many ways that the Alberta government helps our seniors. We all know that volunteer activities are inextricably linked to Alberta and the spirit of helping and benevolence that lives in the hearts of citizens. This motion would function as a catalyst to encourage further development of this spirit amongst Albertans and especially amongst seniors.

Our society places a great deal of emphasis on youth and its benefits. We see this in so many programs. This is understandable because there is certainly a great amount of vitality, strength, and innovation that young people lend to any endeavour that they're involved in. However, I'd venture to say that without balancing the value of youth with the value of older persons, we are in danger of losing an important cornerstone of our society. I believe that a progressive society such as Alberta's should be able to embrace its past with equal intensity as it does its present and its future.

Madam Speaker, as difficult as it may be to accept, other cultures have been more successful in recognizing the value of older persons. They have passed on life stories, celebrated old lives, and placed an emphasis on ensuring that elders are more comfortable while they are aging, including being a part of and living with their families. In this respect I believe we have a lot to learn from these cultures, and I'm pleased that the United Nations has taken the initiative by establishing the International Year of Older Persons. Moving towards a society for all ages is an admirable goal, and through this motion we have the opportunity to increase respect for and awareness of the value of seniors in our society.

We're all well aware of the past contributions of older persons. We have parents or grandparents who overflow with stories of obstacles and problems that they overcame to settle this fine province. It is through the hard work and ingenuity of our forebears that we have the privilege to live where we live today. However, Madam Speaker, we sometimes forget to look beyond these stories and consider the contributions that our seniors are continuing to give today. Although their present contributions are perhaps different from their original ones, this certainly does not diminish their value. In fact, current contributions are as important to future generations as what was done in the past.

Although many of the contributions of older persons are not readily visible, Madam Speaker, they are still very numerous. Many seniors volunteer with Meals on Wheels to deliver hot, healthy meals

to their peers or shut-ins or those who are unable to cook for themselves. They also provide transportation for their peers to religious events, health services, and various community activities.

Seniors also have knowledge and experience that can assist in the training and growth of young people. By working alongside students in schools or in various clubs, seniors are afforded an excellent opportunity to demonstrate and share their work ethic. They are also able to encourage students to continue learning by sharing their own stories and advice. Of course, we all know that those stories are many and varied. We must remember, Madam Speaker, that the lives and experiences of our seniors are invaluable to the education and socialization of our children. Seniors possess readily available wisdom that has taken them years to gain and will aid youth in their adult lives.

Madam Speaker, as chair of the minister's seniors service awards committee, I am aware of the importance of recognizing the current contributions of seniors. This committee was established in 1997 by the hon. minister responsible for seniors and is intended to give out awards to formally recognize the significant contributions that seniors make to the province and to their communities. The first award was given out last year, in 1998, and I am proud to note that the Wetaskiwin Senior Citizens' Society was the first recipient in the community service category. The other recipients included Antoinette Tellier from Bonnyville and Ruth Pratt from Edson in the individual category and the Kerby Centre of Calgary and Santa's Secret Service Society of Alberta in the senior service organization category.

This year the committee will be proud to recognize two individual seniors and two organizations for the help they give to seniors. In recognition of 1999 being the International Year of Older Persons, the committee will also give out a special, onetime award. The International Year of Older Persons lifetime service award will be presented to an Alberta senior who has demonstrated a lifetime of exceptional service to other seniors in his or her community. The award will be announced and presented of course during Senior Citizens' Week in the early part of June.

The contributions of seniors are strongly related to encouraging the fiscal strength of their communities as well. It's been estimated that the economic benefits of the volunteer work done by Canadian seniors is well over \$770 million annually. By caring for spouses, family, friends, and neighbours, seniors are partners with the government in reducing health care costs. In 1995 we saw 23 percent of all seniors providing unpaid assistance to other seniors. This is significant, Madam Speaker, since unpaid care can include basic care like visitation or extended care such as providing around-the-clock assistance to ill spouses.

Madam Speaker, recognizing the contributions of seniors in Alberta has a twofold purpose. Recognition is important because it allows people around the province to share in the actions of other Albertans. When Albertans are aware of what is happening in other parts of the province, unity in Alberta is encouraged.

4:00

Recognition of seniors is also important because it provides an impetus for others to get involved. It's catchy, in other words. When people see that volunteering has rewards and that there are many others who are happily involved, they feel a desire to share some of their time as well. So in recognizing the contributions of volunteers, a fine example is set for those who wish to participate.

Madam Speaker, I would like to use the city of Camrose in my constituency as an example of diligent recognition of senior volunteers. While I use Camrose as an example, I also know that I could be using almost any centre in Alberta, including St. Albert,

Mill Creek, Calgary, Bonnyville, and perhaps any other centre. Since Camrose is in my constituency, I'm going to use Camrose as the example.

The Camrose & District Senior Centre has traditionally held a volunteer tea that is organized in order to broadly recognize all older persons who volunteer in the community. The organization also sets aside one day out of Volunteer Week to provide free coffee and doughnuts for everyone who has given of their time and contributed to the community.

Madam Speaker, this year is of particular interest to the Camrose & District Senior Centre. Since it is the International Year of Older Persons, this organization has planned activities that will occur in three phases. I was honoured to have been able to be a part of the first phase, which was a kick-off of the year coupled with their Christmas dinner on December 16. I might say it was a great time. The dinner was great, turkey and all the trimmings. So it was a wonderful time on December 16 to kick off this special year and also to celebrate Christmas.

The second phase involves activities that will be planned by the groups which make up the local seniors' committee. The committee has planned fun activities such as a fiddlers' jamboree and a book fair, and they expect Senior Citizens' Week in June, as I mentioned before, to be a very, very busy time as well.

The third phase will include an ever popular senior centre telethon. This event was originally conceived as a way to pay for the construction of the Camrose & District Senior Centre, which I might say was paid for through these activities and others probably several years ago. So they've been very successful in terms of their fund-raising. This year, though, the telethon will take place on the last Friday of October and will be centred on seniors. Normally, Madam Speaker, the telethon showcases talent in all age groups from around the Camrose area.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Old-time fiddling.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, old-time fiddling.

This year, however, the talent will be provided exclusively by seniors.

While I've drawn on Camrose, as I mentioned, as an example of seniors' activities and service, I know that many other centres are very, very active.

MR. MARZ: The seniors summer games in Olds.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes. Olds, too, with the Seniors Games there.

This was particularly evident as our seniors' awards committee looked through the various applications this year for awards. There were about 180 applications that we reviewed. By the way, there were about 130 last year, so it certainly indicates that there's more and more interest in this particular activity of presenting awards. So it was quite a job to go through all of the 180 applications, but it was very, very good for our committee and particularly good for me, because we talk often about the activities of our seniors, but to really see what's happening through all of these 180 applications was particularly enlightening for me. I want to give a special word of thanks to all who submitted applications. I know that you all are wondering who the award winners are, but you're going to have to wait until the first week of June when those award winners will be announced.

Madam Speaker, this motion is a very timely and admirable one. There is a heightened need of awareness of the contributions of older persons because we are currently living in a time when the number of older persons is rapidly increasing around the world. Consider

that by the year 2025 the number of people aged 60 and above will have risen to 1.2 billion, up from .2 billion in 1950.

As a government we need to encourage citizens to maintain their way of life into their older years. Those who are currently seniors as well as those approaching their senior years must be reminded of their continued value and the respect of their participation and place in society.

So once again I'd like to commend the Member for Calgary-West for bringing forth this motion. I think that we have a start of something that's really quite outstanding in terms of showing our appreciation to our seniors, and I would certainly like to see that continue. For that reason I would like to support this motion and encourage everyone else to support the motion as well.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, just with respect to Motion 513. This has been an exciting year with a lot of events right around the province. I've certainly had the opportunity to attend a number of them in the constituency of Calgary-Buffalo, a constituency with one of the highest concentrations of seniors anywhere in the province. I've certainly been able to see firsthand from frequent visits to the Kerby Centre, which is only a couple of blocks from my Calgary-Buffalo constituency office, the amazing array of programs and services available there not only for seniors but, for the most part, services provided by seniors.

I see in the motion reference to "seniors who utilize their knowledge, experience, and skills" available for volunteer activities and providing "a valuable community service." Certainly we see the evidence of that. Whether it's the Golden Age centre in Calgary or the Confederation Park seniors or the Renfrew Sixty Plus, the city of Calgary has a number of very, very active, very vital seniors' organizations. The Kerby Centre, which has existed since 1973, has an amazing woodworking shop and a host of facilities, including a wonderful resource library, a dining room, and more activities than I thought possible to jam into a single building on a single site, and of course the *Kerby News*, something that I expect most members receive.

I must say in passing, Madam Speaker, that it's curious that in the motion we would recognize the "knowledge, experience, and skills" of seniors when it's employed in terms of volunteering to "provide a valuable community service," yet we neglect to value that knowledge, experience, and skills when it comes to other areas. I look at Bill Pr. 207, that was introduced by the Leader of the Official Opposition, that would provide some much needed relief to seniors. That was a bill that was widely supported by seniors, who said that this would help seniors of modest incomes. Yet it was defeated in this Assembly.

I think of when the Friends of Medicare did their hearings around the state of health care in Alberta. They came to the city of Calgary and made a presentation in a community just a stone's throw from the site of the old Bow Valley centre, General hospital. I remember Cherie Parry, the president of the Kerby Centre, coming and making what I thought was a very powerful presentation about the impact of problems in the health care system, access problems, that were differentially impacting seniors.

So why is it that when seniors, using that knowledge and that experience and those skills that are acknowledged in the motion, talk about things the government ought to be doing that they're not doing, we – I'm talking about the Assembly and the government – don't seem to put the same value and attach the same kind of importance to those powerful messages?

4:10

So, Madam Speaker, it's certainly fine and a very positive thing to acknowledge the International Year of Older Persons. It's

certainly useful to recognize and support seniors, but I think this is one of those things where once again we look for our actions as an Assembly and the actions by government to reflect the nice comforting words, and we see too often in the Assembly that the comforting words are the extent of what we offer. So I accept the motion in the spirit in which it was intended, but I want to mark the contrast we so often see between the wording of this motion and a very checkered record of the government when it comes to providing essential services.

Those are the comments I wanted to make. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak in support of Motion 513, to continue to recognize older persons' contributions, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

As the co-chair for the 18-month interdepartmental study on the impact of the aging population I have had the opportunity to work closely with seniors and to be involved with the International Year of Older Persons movement. The purpose of the study is to examine how the aging population will affect provincial government programs and services for seniors today and tomorrow. Alberta currently has among the best programs in Canada for seniors, and our government wants to ensure that those programs are maintained well into the future. As much of the discussion today has focused on the year, 1999 holds particular significance for seniors designated as the International Year of Older Persons in recognition of the important and growing role that older people play in society.

As the year progresses, we will see how this designation offers communities a special opportunity to celebrate seniors' achievements and contributions. Organizations and individuals across the country have developed specific objectives for the year in consultation with the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for seniors. Many communities have adopted the initiatives organized for this year. Local groups have planned banquets, dances, discussion groups, educational programs, and other activities to promote the International Year of Older Persons and increase understanding of seniors as well as their past and present contributions to Alberta.

Motion 513 urges the continued support of these initiatives and encourages future activities and programs to flourish in all communities, ensuring that the focus upon seniors and all they do will continue long after 1999.

This year also holds special significance for seniors in my very own constituency as Leduc celebrates its 100th anniversary. Many seniors have dedicated a lifetime of work to building the strong and prosperous community the city of Leduc is today. These citizens continue to give generously back to our community and make contributions in numerous different ways. They work as employees and volunteers, provide support and assistance to family, friends, and neighbours, share their knowledge and insight gained through life experiences, and invest their time, talents, and energies in local projects. Seniors are important contributors to family and community life in Leduc and throughout Alberta.

Madam Speaker, all levels of society are engaging in activities with seniors in mind, such as special projects and the focus on service to seniors. As an example, in my own constituency this month Leduc celebrated the 25th anniversary of Meals on Wheels. June brings a pancake breakfast that will kick off one of many events organized for Senior Citizens' Week, and in July the Leduc friendship club is putting on a concert in honour of Leduc's 100th anniversary and the International Year of Older Persons.

Madam Speaker, this province has taken steps to promote the well-being and contributions of older people in all aspects of life. The Department of Community Development has been working with provincial organizations to recognize seniors' contributions and encourage more seniors to become active in their community. The major events and attractions that have been planned this year will increase awareness of the active role of seniors in our community and encourage others to become involved. Communities have encouraged seniors to participate in the planning and implementation of special events, while recognizing other seniors who offer volunteer services. Many communities recognize senior volunteers during National Volunteer Week, April 18 to 24.

Vitalize '99 provincial volunteer conference will be held on June 10, 11, and 12 in 1999. It is anticipated that nearly 2,000 delegates representing 90 community organizations from over 180 different Alberta municipalities will gather to network and learn new skills to further develop their volunteer organizations. This year the theme of The Many Faces of Volunteerism will be recognized through five streams: recognizing our efforts, accessing resources, understanding community needs, working together, and volunteering for life.

Within the volunteering for life stream, Vitalize '99 is supporting the International Year of Older Persons program by having professionals speak on areas related to volunteerism and the older adult. Sessions will include information on the International Year of Older Persons program, retirees, volunteerism, communicating with the older adult, Canadian executive service organizations, efforts by seniors, the senior friendly program, and the recruitment of older adults for volunteering, to name a few.

Another way the government of Alberta recognizes seniors is through the second annual minister's seniors service awards, which will be awarded during Alberta's Senior Citizens' Week, June 6 to 12, 1999. The awards will recognize two individuals and two organizations for contributions to their communities. In addition to these annual awards, one individual will receive a special lifetime service award in recognition of the International Year of Older Persons.

The Department of Community Development also offers a year-round service for seniors called the seniors' information line. This service seeks to enhance the lives of seniors by providing them with information necessary to complement their lifestyles. Since its inception in February of 1994, this line has fielded more than 500,000 calls. As our society continues to age, we must create an environment in which older citizens can remain independent, contributing members of society.

Active living for seniors in Alberta is also being promoted by Alberta Community Development through the sport and recreation branch. As an example, the wellness wagon in co-operation with regional be-fit centres across Alberta will highlight active living opportunities for seniors and emphasize the benefits of regular physical activity. Communities can encourage seniors and community participants to attend events that promote healthy, active living at their local recreational centre and regional be-fit centre.

In communities everywhere the planning and co-ordination of activities this year has fostered positive attitudes and co-operation by enhancing understanding, harmony, and mutual support across the generations. This year we have seen events which include intergenerational exchanges, where seniors visit schools to talk about what Canada was like when they were young and students talk about their interests and skills.

4:20

Community walks, awards recognizing local senior-friendly services, programs, or companies, and the planting of community

gardens are just a few examples of how seniors are involved in our communities and how co-ordination and recognition will carry on even after this year with the acceptance of this motion.

This year has brought some great initiatives to our communities. Let's not have them fade away after 1999 draws to an end. Instead, let's keep the momentum and enhance what we're already doing. I encourage all members to lend their support to Motion 513, and I'd call for the question on Motion 513.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Calgary-West, all those in favour, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:21 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Graham	Melchin
Broda	Hancock	Nicol
Calahasen	Hlady	O'Neill
Cao	Jacques	Paszkowski
Cardinal	Johnson	Renner
Carlson	Jonson	Sapers
Clegg	Klapstein	Severtson
Day	Kryczka	Shariff
Dickson	Laing	Sloan
Doerksen	Langevin	Smith
Ducharme	Leibovici	Stelmach
Dunford	Lougheed	Stevens
Evans	MacDonald	Tannas
Fischer	Magnus	Thurber
Forsyth	Marz	Woloshyn
Friedel	McClellan	Yankowsky
Gibbons	McFarland	Zwozdesky

Totals: For – 51 Against – 0

[Motion carried]

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Third Reading

**Bill 25
Insurance Act**

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Madam Speaker. At this time I wish to move third reading of Bill 25, Insurance Act.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Yes. Madam Speaker, I have at this time a few comments on Bill 25 in third reading. There are still some questions. I realize there's been a significant amount of work done on this. I would like to congratulate the sponsor of this bill for the hard work that has been done on this bill.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, there are outstanding issues, some of which have been addressed. Certainly the issue of continuing education was dealt with last evening. I would like to commend the hon. member for bringing forward this amendment at the time in Committee of the Whole. However, I was understanding that in phase 2, which is going to be an ongoing development of part 5 of this Insurance Act, perhaps a specific contract of insurance could have been addressed. I'm a little disappointed that that was not left out or exempted, because we now are looking at the possibility of health insurance being discussed.

The other issues that I have, then, would deal with sole occupation. I would like to get on the record, Mr. Speaker, regarding sole occupation, because CAIFA had some very, very strong opinions regarding this issue. When we look at the insurance industry and we look at this bill, we have to ensure that it is an industry that is going to prosper in this province.

In discussions earlier I talked about a visit to Calgary and spotting from a distance, from one of the high rises downtown, I believe it was Sun Life. I was sitting quietly and thinking about this bill, Mr. Speaker. I thought: what if in the future this city – the fine cities of Calgary and Edmonton and the whole province, as a matter of fact – continues to diversify its economy? Perhaps it would welcome a further expansion of the insurance industry in this province. Hopefully this bill, Bill 25, is going to be a sound foundation from which the insurance industry can grow, and this can be a base for all of not only western Canada – perhaps I'm being overly optimistic – but the entire western region of North America. We could conveniently or proudly be called the Hartford, Connecticut, of the west in relation to the insurance industry.

Before I close, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to say a few words about compensation disclosure as it relates to this bill. There were some comments brought to my attention. We have to look at cases that are in other provinces and the method of compensation in the insurance industry. People think there should be a method of disclosure but not of the amount. There is a concern that the amount will be meaningless and of questionable benefit to the consumer, and we have to be cautious about the regulation-making power with respect to compensation disclosure and the appearance that it may be too broad. That is one of the issues.

We talked about continuing education before, and I think that is going to be satisfactory to the majority.

This is an extensive piece of legislation. In closing, Mr. Speaker, hopefully this is a solid foundation for an industry to not only prosper but to expand in this province.

With those comments on Bill 25 in third reading, I shall cede the floor to another hon. colleague. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DAY: Just briefly, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed has spent an incredible amount of time on this particular bill, and I daresay that it is one of the more detailed and extensive and more difficult pieces of legislation that we've seen this session and maybe for the last few sessions, just because of the nature and the high degree of technicality that goes with this and the various people and aspects of the industry that have to be worked with and consulted with. So there is a nod of congratulations that should be

given to that particular member for her patience and diligence in terms of working on this.

As with any piece of legislation, the difficulty for the legislators arises when you realize that you cannot 100 percent please all the people affected. There were a number of issues which, as the legislation was reaching its final stage of development, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and people that she was working with took back to the industry. We were headed in one particular direction related to compensation disclosure, and after some ongoing consultation that issue was addressed and resolved.

The issues of sole occupation and also continuing education. At one point it appeared as though the continuing education would not be part of the package, but on further consultation with industry representatives, there was some value added to that discussion. So we see improvement on the bill there with continuing education being in place, compensating how the aspect of sole occupation is handled.

4:40

I know that for certain key and significant players in the industry the issue of rebates, the whole issue of rebating, is still somewhat difficult for some. The commitment by the member to make this a part of the regulatory process and to consult closely with industry as it moves along to see if in fact there are some negative aspects developing is a positive commitment also from that member.

So as with any legislation, Mr. Speaker, and as with any industry, especially in this day of technology and a day of rapidly changing networks and partnerships that develop, we know that legislation is an ongoing, living, breathing thing, and the member whose name graces this particular bill is certainly aware of that also. We'll continue to work with all people in the industry to make sure that this province is vital and attractive to the industry and also to the consumers it serves. I look forward to the ongoing relationship here that has already developed.

Congratulations, again, to the member.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, the comments that I want to make at this stage. I also very much appreciate the work done by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed in preparing the bill, but I just want to make some observations in a general way about the bill. This is a bill that has some 418 pages. It's rife with detail, with conditions, with a dizzying amount of detail. The time we have spent on this bill in the Assembly – at second reading, at committee, and before we add on today – is something less than three and a half hours.

I have this problem, Mr. Speaker. I have a significant problem. As a keen young law student across the river at the University of Alberta I remember that we had a sessional instructor, a fellow by the name of Joe Brumlik, who could write the book about insurance. We spent the better part of a year exploring the nuances of what was then the Alberta Insurance Act and learning about the statutory conditions. The bulk of that time was not dealing with case law, with judicial interpretation; it was just trying to get a handle on the concepts and the elements of the Alberta Insurance Act. I'm thinking to myself, "Here we are, and most of us in this Assembly don't come with a background in the insurance industry; most of us don't come with a background in terms of litigating insurance contracts." So I pose the question: how do you do justice on behalf of Alberta consumers, on behalf of virtually every Albertan that's going to be impacted by this law in simply three and a half hours?

I make an observation and a suggestion, Mr. Speaker, before I specifically enumerate some of the areas where the opposition will be maintaining a vigilant, watching brief. The observation would be this: if we had, like the House of Commons, an all-party committee

of MLAs that had the chance not only to view draft legislation but also to hear submissions and representations from key players in the insurance industry, when it got to this place, how much better informed would the debate be? How much more quickly could we zero in on those issues, and how much more focused could we be on ensuring that there is an informed debate on what's at stake and what's changing?

We have an incredible researcher in the Liberal caucus who has done his usual outstanding job analyzing the bill. We have an amazing MLA who's been working on this bill and counseling and advising our caucus. But, you know, notwithstanding the excellence of Edmonton-Gold Bar and notwithstanding the excellence of that researcher in our caucus office, this is an amazingly gargantuan project to be able to go through and do the kind of detailed, section-by-section analysis that I think it's our responsibility and our job to do.

[The Speaker in the chair]

When I look at the size and the complexity of the bill and the impact it will have on the lives of Albertans, this is surely the very best case I can think of, Mr. Speaker, in terms of why we have to have a process. The best one I can think of that suggests itself to me is the House of Commons standing committees, the all-party committees. You have Reform and Bloc and Liberal and maybe even ND MPs on a committee.

MR. SAPERS: But hardly any Tories.

MR. DICKSON: There might even be. I'm not sure how over-worked those Tory MPs are, but there would be an opportunity.

It surely is a far better model for lawmaking, particularly when you deal with bills like this. Now, maybe there are some members here who think that three and a half hours is plenty, and it may be that Conservative members have had – I don't know how many questions they've been able to ask and get answered. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore, the chair of the August bill review committee . . .

MR. SEVERTSON: Leg. review.

MR. DICKSON: Leg. review. Thank you very much. Leg. review committee.

Maybe they are satisfied with the degree of scrutiny they've been able to provide, but I don't feel in any way satisfied that I have as much confidence with the bill as I'd like to have.

So I'm just going to spend a couple of minutes, having made that process observation, highlighting some of the things that are going to be the subject of the watching brief, that I know our colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar and all members of this opposition are going to be maintaining. We're going to be focused on concerns around the eligibility and the sole or primary occupation concept which has been introduced in this bill. The elimination of the full-time sole occupation provision is going to bear watching. We're going to want to see whether that has some kind of degradation effect on the quality of advice and service that's provided by Alberta insurance agents. As I understand it, there are still questions about the reciprocal nonresident licensing opportunities in other jurisdictions that still have the full-time sole occupancy rules.

We've talked in this Assembly before – and I just refresh everyone's memory – of the concern about no mandatory continuing education. In an area that can be very complex, with a myriad of regulations, rules, never mind statutory conditions, eligibility

requirements, the Liberal opposition thought it was important to have mandatory continuing education, once again to protect and serve and enhance the public interest. We're going to be attempting to monitor the quality of service provided. We're mindful that the AIC, the Alberta Insurance Council, had not supported mandatory continuing education.

You know, this also highlights one of the potential tensions that exist in an act like this, where there's such heavy stakeholder involvement. It's disarmingly attractive and simple to say that we've talked to the insurance industry and they think this is the way to go. But that's not quite good enough, because there's still a question of who serves and protects the public interest. So far the only people I know that have stepped forward to accept that very huge responsibility are the 83 men and women in this Chamber. It's not the Alberta Insurance Council and it's not any particular industry organization that Albertans have elected to protect that public interest. So when we look at issues like mandatory continuing education, yes, there are certainly major players in the industry who think it's not advisable, but one can well question whether the public interest is being as vigorously asserted.

4:50

The other concern had to do with sections 465 and 497, and we're talking of course about those old favourites, the financial guarantees and the compensation plan. Here again we go into another area that I find disquieting. We have this compensation plan that's going to be set up, but it's going to be done entirely by regulation again. Is there a member in this Assembly that needs to hear the pro forma speech on the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations? Is there a single member in this Assembly that has any question about the submission that's been put forward by this opposition consistently to vet regulations? [interjection] The Minister of Environmental Protection I think is asking just how many times we've raised it, and I want to apologize to him and to all members. At this time in the session I usually do my count, and I've been too darn busy, Mr. Speaker, to do it. So I'm not able to advise members today just how many times in this Assembly we've been able to address that gap in our legislative framework.

It surfaces in bill after bill after bill. This does not malign the intentions of anybody in the industry, anybody involved with the bill, but you know, we'd just get better regulations if we had some all-party scrutiny of them. That's all I'm going to say about that. We have some opportunity tonight to go through the full-course meal. [interjection] I know that my MLA, Calgary-North West, is probably going to participate in that debate tonight on those other bills when we're talking about the Standing Committee on Law and Regulations. I'm looking for his support again when we speak to it at that time.

Getting back to Bill 25, there are no details that we have on what this compensation plan is going to look like. We've heard and received assurances, but that's not the same thing as seeing the detail. I'm mindful of what we've seen in other jurisdictions where they prepare the regulatory scheme and publish it. They publish it in draft form, and they circulate it.

This is what happens with the Alberta Securities Commission. When Bill Hess of the Securities Commission proposes some new rules that are going to govern what traders do, they prepare the regulations in advance. They shop them around, and they say: "Liberal opposition, if you have some concerns with them, tell us. Industry players, if you have some concerns, some suggestions, give us your feedback." And you know something, Mr. Speaker? The Alberta Securities Commission has not been brought to a screeching halt. The financial trading in this province has not significantly,

perceptibly been impaired in any way because that happens. So why couldn't we do the same thing, hon. members? Why couldn't we do exactly the same thing with regulations under the Insurance Act? That continues to be a concern.

The other one is focused on section 499, and that's our old friend compensation sharing. We've heard the concern from stakeholders. The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has heard that concern from stakeholders around compensation sharing, and that's one of the other items that the Official Opposition is going to be maintaining a vigilant, watchful brief on. You know, Adam Smith would be happy. The government's perspective is: we'll simply let the market determine that. Well, I believe in the market economy. I'm no Sunday socialist, Mr. Speaker. I recognize the strengths of the market, but I also recognize the limitations of an unregulated market.

MR. SAPERS: So does Steve West.

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, I think that any one of us, when we ponder it, recognize: who would want an unregulated market? Except for maybe the Minister of Energy, I think most of us recognize that there is a legitimate role to protect the public interest, and that comes from government.

If you look at section 499 and look at it carefully – I won't go and read the section now – I do have those concerns, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the fact that now an unauthorized individual can share in compensation. I'm not sure I'm particularly sanguine that the market is going to provide the degree of rigour, the degree of protection that Albertans should be entitled to.

The other item. This is section 501, and it's the antirebating provision. We know that there's been a lot of resistance in the life insurance industry to the antirebating provision. I think that the provision in section 520(b) is going to be particularly interesting. If you look at 501(1) of the act, which prohibits insurers from charging premiums other than as stated in the contract of insurance, we see the change that is affected by section 501. I think those concerns will remain. We have an existing practice, which seems to work reasonably well. We have a practice that a company should be enjoined or prevented from practising unfair discrimination between individuals presenting the same risk. You know, this was never seen as a kind of price-fixing, but I think there are issues around that that remain unresolved.

The other item on which we'd maintain our watching brief would be on the deposit-taking institutions. Referring here specifically, Mr. Speaker, to sections 454, 498(a) and (f), to sections 852, 854, 861, we once again are going to have to rely on and await regulations to find out what types of insurance products deposit-taking institutions are going to be able to distribute.

I've had the chance and I suspect many other members in the Assembly have had the chance of talking to the Canadian Bankers Association. We know what the bankers would like to achieve in terms of the insurance realm. Does that mean we just provide them what they ask for without asking the tough questions? Have the tough questions been asked here in debate on Bill 25? Well, from my best review of *Hansard* and listening to the able analysis and able response from the sponsor from Calgary-Lougheed, we hear a lot in terms of best intentions. We also hear an awful lot about how more is going to be done by way of regulation. So that continues to be a concern.

I think we're just going to have to assess the impact on the banking industry, but more significant and of more paramount importance is the impact on Alberta consumers. This is one of those areas where I suspect that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed – and if not the Member for Calgary-Lougheed then the Provincial

Treasurer – has got access to all kinds of analyses and internal reports that have been done. I go back to the authority we cited when we were dealing with Bill 15, the Natural Heritage Act, where, at least in the House of Commons in Westminster, if the government is advancing a piece of legislation which is largely based on major reports, analyses, reviews, the Speaker in fact has required ministers and bill sponsors, according to *Erskine May*, in some cases to actually make that report available so that there would be a full and informed debate in the Assembly.

5:00

Now, I know there have been some briefings. I know there have been some briefings of my colleague for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but I'm not sure we've reached that high point of parliamentary practice where the government actually makes available some of the source documents. Maybe that's happened, and I just was asleep at the switch when those things were tendered. I'm not sure, Mr. Speaker, that's the case though. The concern in any event continues.

The other point I would touch on is the unfair practices, because that continues to be a concern. In section 509 we have a prohibition against "any unfair, coercive or deceptive practice," but those words are amazingly broad. Are we going to have to wait for regulation hatched in secret again to determine whether it's going to be too broad and expansive or appropriately narrow? We don't know.

Those are the comments I wanted to make, and we look forward to further comments on this Bill 25. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I will recognize you in just a second on this particular matter.

Earlier today, hon. members, at the conclusion of the normal Routine we had to deal with some matters of points of order. There was one raised by the Minister of Family and Social Services on which the chair made some comments respecting the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, and I would now like to invite her.

Point of Order Member's Apology

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to stand and apologize to any or all members of the Assembly who took offence by my tabling earlier today. The minister, in response to Motion for a Return 12, indicated that the report had not been completed and therefore was not available. I did not believe that the minister's reply constituted a reply under the requirements for Motions for Returns.

The policy review report on adoptions was due in February '98. It is my understanding that the report is completed and available. The commitment to provide this report was made by the minister on November 26, 1998, and to date the report has not been released.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Assembly will accept the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview's apology.

Debate Continued

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I've had considerable material forwarded to my attention from stakeholders involved in the insurance industry in this province regarding Bill 25. There has been a tremendous amount of discussion, pro and con, about the bill. There has been discussion about the amount the bill has actually left to regulation, as comprehensive as the bill is. There has also been an expression, I think, of goodwill that's been extended because of

the work by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that. I have had some comments from representatives of financial institutions who don't like some aspects about dual licensing. I've had other comments from independent insurance brokers who don't think that there's enough recognition in the bill of what it takes to make a living in that business these days.

I have a couple of concerns that I would just like to put on the record at third reading stage. My primary concern is not that dissimilar from what I've heard from other members. That has to do with the number of issues that are really left unresolved in the legislation that don't provide, I think, reasonable guidance, not just to the industry but to consumers, because the detail is left to regulation, whether it's got to do with the rebating and antirebating or whether it's got to do with ongoing education or whether it's got to do with compensation schemes.

There is so much of the real nitty-gritty that is left to regulation that there's this sense that people who have a concern are going to have to make extraordinary efforts to keep themselves informed and apprised of what the rules of the road are. I don't think that's appropriate when it comes to such an important consumer issue. I believe that if there's one failing of the bill, it's that individual Albertans, both those who are consumers of insurance products and those who are sellers and resellers of insurance products, are going to have to probably become to some extent real Legislature watchers to find out what it is that Executive Council is up to in the making of regulations.

I'm aware of the concerns raised about ongoing education. I think with perhaps a little more consultation the concerns raised by the industry could have been dealt with. I'm a proponent of ongoing education, and I think that some further compromise could have been achieved.

There are many changes coming in the insurance business. I'm not sure that Bill 25 properly or completely anticipates all of these changes: changes in terms of offshore resellers of insurance products, multinational corporations involved in the business, electronic means of selling and even adjudicating or adjusting insurance policies and claims.

I'm very puzzled, quite frankly, by some of the regulations in this country that allow for major multinational companies headquartered in other countries to be involved in the selling of certain insurance products but other Canadian national companies, primarily those in deposit taking institutions, not being able to sell those same products and what that means for the flow of capital out of this country and what it means in terms of Canadian investors in a fairly regulated industry versus those investors in the international marketplace that may not be subject to the same restrictions and regulations.

The financial services sector is rapidly changing. It's very dynamic right now. It's particularly dynamic here in Alberta where there's lots of discussion and controversy about the changing roles of credit unions, the changing role of the Alberta Treasury Branch. So when we're dealing with banks and deposit-taking institutions and their role in selling insurance and reselling insurance and whether or not they will have continuing restrictions in the kind of insurance products, I think there's still a lot of debate open there, Mr. Speaker.

You know, if banks are restricted to selling basically life insurance for their loans, that means one thing. If they get into wholly owned subsidiaries selling a whole variety of insurance products, that means something else. As deposit-taking institutions and traditional insurance companies become less and less distinguishable, we wonder what that means for the future in terms of selling various other kinds and classes of insurance and whether the fire walls that have been erected now will be able to withstand the heat, so to speak, of marketplace competition. The hon. Member for

Edmonton-Gold Bar mentioned previously this lingering concern that all of us in the Official Opposition have about the government creating a climate so that private insurers can get into the market of selling primary health insurance and the eroding base of the kind of public scheme that we have right now. This bill does not really close the door on the questions or the concerns even though the bill does go some way; it does accomplish I think many good things.

I'd like to end my comments by briefly mentioning section 509. Section 509 of the proposed act talks about unfair practices and in subsection (c) there is a prohibition against "unfair, coercive or deceptive practice." Mr. Speaker, in the definition section of the bill there are no definitions of "unfair, coercive or deceptive practice." Many stakeholders, I'm told, believe that the reference to unfair, coercive, and deceptive practice is far too broad. The stakeholders would like some specification as to what is meant by the Legislature when it comes to unfair, coercive, and deceptive practice.

5:10

If I were out there in industry right now and I had a whole arsenal of sales techniques, I'm not sure that I would want to run the risk of running afoul of the Legislature's prohibition against unfair, coercive, and deceptive practices without it being manifestly clear what it is that I may be doing that is wrong. So I think we need to have more discussion about what this phrase means before the regulations are passed. I think that industry needs to come to the table perhaps with their own definition of what they would consider to be unfair, coercive, and deceptive. I would like to see equal effort made to going to consumer groups and getting their definition of what unfair, coercive, and deceptive means. Once we have input from at least those two sides and perhaps other stakeholders as well, we could come up with an amendment to this bill, perhaps even leaving the proclamation of this section out until the Legislature can provide some more specific direction or guidance on what is deceptive and unfair and coercive.

I've been involved, Mr. Speaker, while I was going to university, in direct sales of one kind or another. I can remember being encouraged by sales managers, whether it was pots and pans or vacuum cleaners, to try doing this or try doing that. I can tell you that there was a reason why I didn't pursue a career in that industry. It was because it was always a consumer-driven process. In fact, often it wasn't. So being at least familiar with the potential for what could be on the one hand considered simply creative and innovative and on the other hand may be considered deceptive, coercive, and unfair, I can say that it just can't be left to regulation that could change from time to time without making sure that there is strong input and guidance coming from all of the stakeholder groups and then eventually that being translated into something that's in the legislation.

Even if it was made as part of a schedule, Mr. Speaker, that could be reviewed from time to time, maybe sunset it so that it has a three- or five-year review so that we can be kept current. I think that would answer a lot of the concerns. It would certainly make this member feel a lot better that I'd done my job in terms of being vigilant in terms of consumer protection. I think people in the industry would appreciate it as well, because what I do know about people involved in direct sales and those men and women who earn their living in the insurance industry in particular is that nothing makes them more angry than one of the bad apples in their bunch. Unfortunately, there are bad apples from time to time. As we know in public life, it only takes one bad apple often to taint the whole barrel, so I think we have a responsibility to do just a little better job in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes my comments on Bill 25.

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before calling for the question, I do want to acknowledge the kind comments of my colleague the Provincial Treasurer on third reading and also to acknowledge that while I didn't know what I was getting into when he asked me to take on this project two years ago, to see the Insurance Act rewrite through to completion, it was more challenging than I expected, but it was equally rewarding. That is largely due to the fine people that I had the privilege of working with throughout this whole process.

I was assisted by Treasury officials who were tireless in their efforts to help me out and ensure that I had the support that I needed. In particular, I would like to recognize the superintendent of insurance, Mr. Bernard Rodrigues, with whom I worked with most closely, and I must say that I have no hesitation in saying that he personifies all of the best qualities a civil servant could. I think we're very fortunate to have him in the government of Alberta in that capacity.

I would also like to say that I was very impressed with the quality of the submissions provided by the insurance industry groups and individuals that took the time to make both written presentations and verbal presentations. I hadn't had much experience with the insurance industry to this point, but I can say that my experience with them was that they are a most professional group, and it made my work much easier.

I would also like to thank the hon. members from the opposition for their reflections and questions. I appreciate the support that they have given to this bill.

I'd also like to say that I am confident that this new legislation, as far as we have rewritten the Insurance Act, will be a model in Canada, if not in North America, for new rules of corporate governance, market conduct, and the licensing of intermediaries.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to call for the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 25 read a third time]

Bill 22
Health Professions Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to move third reading of Bill 22, the Health Professions Act.

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

MS BARRETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I said on the record before that I'm very curious about why this legislation is in front of us, because all of the professions regulated under this bill already have their own governing legislation. What I'm worried about is that there is some hidden agenda, perhaps something to do with regulations, that the government would like to have the ability to amend a regulation under this act which would be contentious perhaps only to one of the health care professionals covered by the act and of little or no interest perhaps to the other professionals, such that the people directly affected might feel isolated or feel like their powers or authorities are being eroded. It would not be like changing the legislation. That's my worry about this bill.

As well, I didn't bring the letter up with me, but Lorraine Way, the president of the Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, did send me a copy of the letter that she wrote to the sponsoring member in which she conceded that the government amendment with respect to restricted activities was adequate but not to the real satisfaction of the AARN. However, they seem prepared to wait and see if further changes to the legislation are required.

I must say that it is in the wake of the government's rejection of the NDP-sponsored amendment with regard to the sections involving the College of Physicians and Surgeons that has now rendered me incapable of supporting this bill in third reading. I keep looking for ways to make it easy for the government to rule out for-profit hospitals. This minor amendment dealt with last night would have restricted the College of Physicians and Surgeons' ability to accredit long stay, as they called them in Bill 37, nonhospital surgical facilities. What the blue-ribbon panel ultimately said was: you'd better call it a hospital. If it smells like a hospital, looks like a hospital, acts like a hospital, it must be a hospital. The government did not take us up on this offer, I regret to say.

5:20

I know that in response to my second supplementary question to the Health minister last Wednesday, he basically said: stay tuned, kid; you might like what you hear in the fall. What I might hear in the fall might be as little as: okay; the government has declared a policy right now – policies are not written in stone – that we will not be allowing for-profit hospitals at this point. Remember that because it's not in legislation or even in regulation. The public will say: oh, well, the government said that. But there's nothing to keep the government committed to that policy. I'm utterly convinced now that this is what the Health minister and the government are planning to do, simply because of their refusal to support any number of amendments we've offered to several bills which would ban for-profit hospitals.

So while I recognize that the professional members who are covered by this act all require their own individual governing legislation, I remain suspicious about the real purpose of getting them all under one act and, of course, am reluctant to support a government that won't make a positive commitment to banning for-profit hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, that's all I have to say at this point, so I would now beg leave to adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands has moved that debate now be adjourned. Would all members in favour please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE SPEAKER: The motion is carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:22 p.m.]