

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, November 30, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/11/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us so that we may use the privilege given us as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly. Give us the strength to labour diligently and the courage to think and to speak with clarity and conviction and without prejudice or pride. Amen.

Please be seated.

Hon. members, on this day, November 30, in 1911 the Alberta Legislative Assembly first met inside this Legislature Building. The building itself was still unfinished.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to present another ACTISEC petition asking for a tuition freeze. This is signed by 817 concerned citizens from Edmonton, Red Deer, Delburne, Penhold, and Eckville. That brings us to a total of 2,240 signatures presented on these petitions by the Liberals so far.

Thank you.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 104 Calgaryans in a number of constituencies, including Calgary-North West and Calgary-Buffalo. They 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.

Thanks very much.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd present a petition signed by 109 Calgaryans urging 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-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of 513 Albertans from Edmonton, Red Deer, St. Albert, High Level, Edson, and Bonnyville urging the government to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the Board.

This brings the total that have been presented in this short session of the Legislature to over 6,400.

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, with your permission I'd like to present a petition signed by another 111 Calgaryans, and this, of course, is a petition supporting public and separate schools. It reads in part:

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-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 249 Albertans, most of them from the great city of Lethbridge and a few from other surrounding communities, urging this Assembly to call on this government to freeze tuition and institutional fees for postsecondary students in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the ACTISEC petition asking for a tuition freeze that I presented yesterday be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, urge the Legislative Assembly to freeze tuition and institutional fees and increase support in the foundation of post-secondary education.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask that the petition I presented yesterday urging this government to ban private, for-profit hospitals be read and received now.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to conduct an independent public inquiry of the Workers' Compensation Act, including an examination of the operations of the WCB, the Appeals Commission, and the criteria for appointments to the board.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I'd ask that the petition I introduced yesterday having to do with calling for remedial action to deal with underfunding of public schools in Calgary now be 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.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) I am giving notice that tomorrow I will move that written questions appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of Written Question 237 and, also, that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 234 and 233.

Thank you.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, this is the last day of national Family Violence Prevention Month. Family violence has often been addressed in this Legislative Assembly. When we talk about family violence and abuse in homes, we are not really addressing elder abuse. I've attended quite a few meetings, and elder abuse is very prevalent in this province as well. I will table the appropriate number of copies of these pamphlets.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table copies of the report *Operating in the Dark: The Gathering Crisis in Canada's Public Health Care System* by researchers with the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies and Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. The report finds ample evidence that private/public partnerships do work to the benefit of the public health system.

Also, I wish to table an excerpt from the 1998 study *Who is the Master? A Blueprint for Canadian Healthcare Reform* by Monique Jerome-Forget and Claude E. Forget. These Canadian researchers also find ample evidence to show that private-sector participation in the public health system can be beneficial.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a list of some revenue projections that contain, unfortunately, some errors of omission. The first column shows that the government's Budget '99 projections on their estimates for revenue were \$16.8 billion, and the second column shows another forecasting agency saying that they thought revenues would be \$19 billion. We checked with that organization. It was trying to appear as if back in March they projected revenues to be \$19 billion. Unfortunately, it shows that in March this organization tabled projections which show that they were \$16 billion, not \$19 billion, lower than our projections. That agency was the Liberal Party, and there are some very serious omissions here.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Let's move on.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the requisite copies of a letter that I just received this morning. It is a letter from World Wildlife Fund. The letter states that "Canadians

are looking to Premier Klein to show political leadership over the coming months" in completing Canada's land-based protected area system by the year 2000 as per the tri-council statement of commitment signed by Alberta and other provinces. They have sought my support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

1:40

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document prepared by the Alberta Liberal research staff entitled *Budgets vs. Second Quarter Budget Updates, 1993/94-1999/2000*, on which it shows a significant variance every year in terms of the Treasurer's homework.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table five copies of several documents related to the lockout at the Bethany care centre in Cochrane. There are a number of letters to various persons including the board, but the top copy is probably the most important. This outlines the differences in benefits received by Bethany Cochrane compared to the Calgary Bethany care centre.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have tabled in the last several days studies with respect to New Zealand, then the United States, then Ontario; now a study done by Albertans with respect to the Alberta situation showing that consumer costs in contracting out to private organizations is in fact more costly.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only one tabling today. It's an excerpt from the September/October issue of *Privacy Files*, a Montreal-based magazine focused on privacy issues, that talks about the dangerous elements of Bill 40.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I table the appropriate number of copies of a proclamation by Mayor Al Duerr of Calgary in which he proclaims Disabled Parking Awareness Day, and I'll send a copy over to the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an excellent guide prepared by the Womanspace Resource Centre to empower people advocating for SFI supports and benefits.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate numbers of copies of a map showing the route possibilities around Milk River for highway 4.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 23 energetic grade 6 students from the school at Thorhild. Accompanying them are teachers Mike Popowicz, Mrs. Cindy Olchow, Mrs. Penny Fehr, Mrs. Mary Toronchuk, Mrs. Judy Jacques, and Mrs. Donna Friebe. They're seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two classes from Wes Hosford elementary school in the neighbouring constituency of Sherwood Park. They're accompanied by teachers Ms Dimitroff and Mrs. Macyk and helpers Jim Tobias and Irene Nonnenmacher. They're seated in the public gallery. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and to all members here 12 very energetic students from the Argyll home education services school that is centred in my constituency. They come from all across the city, and today they've come here to observe the democratic process. I would ask that they along with their helpers and instructors, Barbara van Ingen and Susan Wood, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome from every member of the House.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 17 students from Coralwood academy in the constituency of Edmonton-Calder along with their group leader Mrs. Linda Steinke. The parent drivers are Mrs. Diane Hawthorn and Mrs. Veronica Nechita. If they would be so kind as to rise in both galleries and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly visitors from St. Mary's high school in Vegreville. They are accompanied today by teacher Mrs. Colleen Fjeldheim, parent helper Mrs. Rose Kisilevich, and bus driver Pastor Steven Rigby. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to introduce 24 people who up until three weeks ago were working at the Bethany health centre in Cochrane. They have been locked out, and negotiations have gone nowhere, apparently. They took one of those yellow school buses down this morning from Cochrane. In particular, I'd like to introduce the president of the AUPE local, Kim Woodcock, and the vice-president, Carol Tardif. They are accompanied today also by Dan MacLennan, the president of AUPE, and Tim Gough, who is on the staff at AUPE. I believe they are in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you and to all Members of the Legislative Assembly my new researcher. His name is Dave Rodwell, and he's a retired 20-year RCMP officer. He's had extensive background in homicide and sexual assault. Presently Dave is the area governor with the Toastmasters organization. Dave also volunteers with the St. Albert special olympics and the Community Service Advisory Board. I would ask Dave to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. In September of 1995 this Premier promised Albertans that he would have a plan to fix health care within 90 days. Now, 1,500 days into his 90-day plan, he has blown up one Calgary public hospital and sold two more public hospitals off to private health companies. Across Alberta he has created huge increases in waiting lists and in suffering. Will the Premier just admit that his health fix has failed and has resulted in nothing but longer wait lists and increased suffering for Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: No.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, with his April 21, 1998, statement in this House the Premier said, "We are not promoting in any way, shape, or form private hospitals or private health care." Will the Premier explain exactly who he thinks he's fooling?

MR. KLEIN: We're not fooling anyone, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact we have gone to great lengths to put out to the public our policy statement, to get public comment on the policy statement as it relates to proposed legislation to be introduced next spring. We've completely outlined the fundamentals of that particular policy. It states that we are firmly committed to the principles of the Canada Health Act. I can't see anything wrong with that. We need to find new ways to reduce waiting lists and alleviate suffering. Well, even the federal Minister of Health, Mr. Rock, concedes that point. He says that the status quo is no longer an option.

It talks about Albertans having access to insured medical services "through the publicly funded and publicly administered health care system." It talks about no Albertans having to pay for insured medical services and nobody getting faster services because they have more money. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm sure the Liberals agree with that particular policy.

It talks about regional health authorities being responsible for all insured surgical services. There's nothing wrong with that policy. I'm sure the Liberals agree. If they don't, stand up and say so.

It says that private providers of insured surgical services will be able to operate but only under contract with a regional health authority and only within the principles of the Canada Health Act. Well, that's already taking place. I haven't heard the Liberals answer the question, Mr. Speaker: would they like to see all contracts terminated with RHAs as they pertain to abortions? Right? They have never answered the question. They do it already with eye surgeries and other procedures.

It also spells out quite clearly that these principles will prohibit the development of a parallel, for-profit health care system. You know,

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure they believe in that principle. If they don't, stand up and say so.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that 12 days ago – 12 days ago – in this House the Premier said that he would pick up his phone and phone his buddies at the Calgary regional health authority to make their secret contracts public, why has the Premier broken his word?

MR. KLEIN: I would ask the leader of the Liberal opposition to read *Hansard*. I said, Mr. Speaker: perhaps these people can pick up the phone and phone the regional health authority. Yes, Jim Dinning is a friend of mine, but he's a great buddy also of the leader of the Liberal opposition.

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

Regional Health Authorities

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have to listen very, very carefully to this Premier's words because he's very skilled at splitting hairs. At splitting hairs. Yup, at splitting hairs. Another example is this Premier's promise to elect regional health authorities. Now, given that in February of '97 the Premier promised Albertans that regional health authority boards would be elected and almost three years later they're still being handpicked by the cabinet, is this not another broken promise to Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: No, it's not a broken promise at all; it's a delayed promise. Mr. Speaker, elections were to have been held for regional health authorities in conjunction with the last municipal elections. We heard from a number of health authorities that they were still in the midst of restructuring, that the job and the pathways to health hadn't been completely finished, and that it would be very disruptive to change the governance model at that particular time. We are firmly committed to the election of health authority trustees in conjunction with the next municipal election and in accordance with the policy that we've established, and that is that two-thirds of those members be elected.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, since the Premier won't let Albertans see how their tax dollars are being spent by the Calgary regional health authority now, how can he pretend that future contracts for private hospitals won't be hidden from public scrutiny as well?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, all regional health authorities, not just Calgary, operate within budgets set down in accordance with business plans. Relative to that question and how the various regional health authorities operate and provide accountability to the public, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think we have previously covered the whole matter of the government, of course, wanting to abide by the freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation, which the Liberals across the way have certainly said they support, but I also think it's important to be reminded that the expenditure with respect to the health system, be it Alberta Health and Wellness or the regional authorities, does go through the scrutiny of the Auditor General.

I think there's another major concern here, Mr. Speaker, with the remarks from across the way, and that is that we do have regional health authorities in this province operating very effectively. There have been certain comparisons made vis-a-vis the previous question

of the hon. leader, and that is that we should note that right here in Edmonton, where we have the privilege of deliberating in this Legislature, the Capital regional health authority was chosen number one in this country in terms of their performance particularly in the area of the continuity of care and home care and community care. Now, that is, I think, the recognition of the accomplishment of the systems we have in place.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that the Wellnet, his health information and billing network, is now up and running and that Bill 40 will allow regional health authorities to share Albertans' personal health information with private hospitals, will this Premier just admit that the framework he needs to contract out health services to private hospitals is almost complete?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. The policy statement is out there. It's our intention to receive as much input as we possibly can and certainly to continue our negotiations with the federal government relative to adherence to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act.

I had the opportunity just the other day of seeing Wellnet in operation in High Prairie and how that can be brought into Bill 40.

Mr. Speaker, this is the sharing of health information between physicians. It's there to avoid the tremendous cost of travel by people in isolated areas where this information can be transmitted through satellite via television and can be examined by a physician on the receiving end so he knows how to treat the element when the patient comes in.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We have been asking for the contracts that show the private contracting out that currently exists in this province for the last two weeks. So far this Premier has refused to reveal those contracts, which are clearly the best proof available of the real costs associated with contracting out. What we do know from the study that's been tabled today is that surgeries now contracted out by this government to the private operators cost Albertans more and put sick people in the very difficult position of making medical decisions based on cost. For example, private cataract surgeries cost Albertans more out-of-pocket than do surgeries in the public system, and we have no reason to believe that hip replacements will be any different. So my questions are to the Premier about his new privatization. Why do lenses used in cataract surgeries cost the public system around \$90 but cost Albertans up to \$750 when applied in private clinics?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true or not. It's a detailed medical question that perhaps can be answered more fully by the hon. minister.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Official Opposition is not being perfectly accurate with respect to her comments. Sometimes one can put smoke over the situation by not giving the full information, which I think she well knows. With respect to contracts for cataract surgery and the standard lens, this is covered, both the surgery and the lens, for individuals having that service without cost.

Now, across the health care system there are, of course, additional

expenses. [interjections] Yes, yes. But let me just use an example which may be more understandable to the people across the way. That is that in our publicly funded hospitals if a person breaks their arm, they get a standard plaster cast which assures the recovery of that particular limb. If they wish for convenience purposes or for something to do with their lifestyle to have a fibreglass cast, they can pay extra for it and get it, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, how are Albertans and mostly seniors whose eyesight is fading supposed to be able to pay for these contracts, when they are desperately worried about their health care, when one of them will cost \$100 or more, out of their own pocket?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the hon. minister just offered an explanation and provided a perfectly good example. The basic costs of all these procedures and the aids associated with these procedures are fully covered under Alberta health care. If people want something extra, then there is an extra charge, Mr. Speaker.

It is precisely those kinds of statements that are misleading, Mr. Speaker, those kinds of statements that allude to the misinformation I was talking about that's being spread by the Liberals and the fear mongering that is being spread by the Liberals.

2:00

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what happens to Albertans who want hip replacements but a little something extra when it comes to having those replacements done in private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, it states quite clearly in the policy that if any procedure is to be contracted by the regional health authority, the legislation will require to the satisfaction of the minister a cost-benefit analysis. It's as simple as that.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Actually, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona does have the floor.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier speaking in the House left the impression that it was the WCB that made the decision to pay public hospitals only one-quarter as much as the WCB pays private clinics for the same surgical procedure. This is false. It is the ministry of health that forbid RHAs from accepting the higher WCB fees. My question is to the minister of health. Why did Alberta Health send a directive to the RHAs prohibiting them from accepting the enhanced facility fees that the WCB pays to private clinics? I do have the document here from WCB, and I'll send it to the minister.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I provided this information in response to a question yesterday, but I will repeat it, and that is that the rate that our public health care system across Canada pays for the services that are contracted with WCB is a national agreement with respect to this particular matter, something arrived at, as I understand, in the spirit of the Canada Health Act, which I assume the hon. member supports. I believe that right now it is in the amount of about \$400. We in Alberta, quite frankly, would like to see that particular fee revisited because it's been there for a period of time and does not reflect a realistic cost. In the spirit of being part of our great country and co-operating with other provinces, we are part of that agreement. That is where that fee is set.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As late as this morning WCB insisted that they are willing to pay \$1,800 for the surgery to public hospitals, and the minister hasn't answered that question; why he's not allowing it?

My next question, Mr. Speaker: isn't the fact that the WCB needs to pay private clinics up to four and a half times more than public hospitals for the same surgery simply one more piece of evidence that it would be much more cost-effective to reduce waiting lists by expanding capacity in the public system? If not, why not, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, I do feel that there should be an updating of the costs of those surgeries, and they should be placed at a more realistic level. Certainly, the figure of \$1,800 is one that the hon. member quotes, and that may be in the ballpark these days.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the members across the way must be consistent here, and that is that if you feel we should be abiding by federal legislation and by federal agreements, then say so. If you don't think we should abide by the agreements, say so as well. We're abiding by the agreement. We would like to see it reviewed and the costs be assessed more realistically.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the Premier. Would the Premier give an undertaking to this House today to put an immediate end to this ingenious innovation of his government to get private, for-profit hospitals subsidized at public expense?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, that is not the intention at all. The intention here is to find new and better and more effective ways of reducing waiting lists and alleviating suffering under the public health care system and in full accordance with the principles of the Canada Health Act. It's as simple as that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a responsibility to help Albertans who need it most. That's why I'm concerned when some Albertans claim that the province's programs for the disabled, including the AISH program, are not adequate. My constituents have asked me to inquire of the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: what is the government's policy to adequately fund programs for the disabled?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I think I'd like to focus on the AISH program because it's one that has been increased substantially and actually has gone over very, very well with Albertans. Members here in the House will know and the Alberta public should be aware by now that we did increase the maximum payment per month to \$855. I'd also want to let people know that we do provide medical coverage, and apparently this averages about \$200 per month. So in total we're putting \$270 million in benefits in the AISH program, and we believe we're assisting upwards of 24,500 people.

What we want to indicate, though, today, Mr. Speaker, is that we're just not resting on those laurels as far as AISH is concerned. AISH is changing. We will continue, of course, to provide basic support, but we're also now looking for opportunities to help AISH clients into volunteer work, to train and perhaps even to enter the workforce without losing their medical card.

MRS. O'NEILL: Mr. Speaker, then, is the minister saying that all AISH clients must go to work?

MR. DUNFORD: No. No, we're not saying that, Mr. Speaker, but disabled Albertans, the people that are on AISH, have said: look; give us a chance to participate here in Alberta as well. They're saying – and I think it's right – that government programs shouldn't penalize someone that wants to get out and participate in the Alberta advantage.

So what we're going to be doing, Mr. Speaker, is allowing AISH clients to take a look at our Alberta community employment program and see if there's a way in which they can enter that particular area. Members will remember that in the reform program in AISH we are allowing now an earnings potential of up to \$200 a month without any sort of penalty on the AISH payment.

We're thinking that this will be of assistance. We're assuring AISH people that if they want to take a risk, go out and attempt to find employment, of course, they will not lose their medical cards. If, in fact, they should be successful, we would actually provide them with a window of opportunity for up to two years so that if it doesn't prove successful for them, they'll be able to come back into the AISH program and not go through all of the red tape, then, of reapplying for AISH.

So we think it's a – actually, I could use the term wonderful. I think it's a wonderful reform that we're making to that AISH program.

MRS. O'NEILL: To the same minister then: what is the connection among the directive to the AISH recipients wishing to seek employment and the advocacy role of the Premier's council for persons with disabilities and this newly established Employability Council?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think we have a nice convergence here, Mr. Speaker, of policy and then into program. Yes, the Premier announced an Employability Council. It's going to be chaired by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Recently, we named 15 Albertans to that Employability Council. They represent employers, they represent associations, and more importantly they represent Albertans with disabilities. The Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities will also have input.

2:10

Basically, what we're looking for is finding ways to overcome, reduce, eliminate in whatever way we can the barriers to employment that Albertans with disabilities face. We think this is going to be an excellent, excellent initiative, and we're looking forward to the work of the Employability Council.

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

Long-term Care

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Is this government considering or has it considered using asset testing to determine seniors' eligibility to receive a subsidy for long-term health care?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. There has been no consideration given to asset testing. As the hon. member well knows, there is a process of income testing relative to the amount seniors pay in Alberta health care premiums.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Also to the Premier: is there or was

there a formal committee or working group examining asset testing, and if so, who is the membership on that committee?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know of any group that was ever formed to determine asset testing. Some time ago as we were going through health care restructuring and doing a re-examination of the delivery of health services in all areas, the whole issue of seniors and the issue of premiums was certainly discussed, but I'm not aware of any committee to discuss asset testing.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if I might supplement, as hon. members of the Assembly know, we commissioned or established an overall review in terms of long-term care health services in this province, sometimes known by the name of its chair, Broda, a member of this Assembly. The mandate of that particular committee was to look at the whole broad spectrum in terms of the future needs for long-term care, assisted living, and care for our seniors in this province from a health perspective.

Mr. Speaker, it was a very, very, very thorough process, and one of the issues that is addressed in their report is the issue of the proper balance between what people in long-term care facilities should reasonably pay with respect to room and board costs and what should be covered in terms of health costs. [interjections] The hon. members across the way who ooh and ah well know that that is part of the report.

They also know, I think, Mr. Speaker, that while a very significant section of the report is devoted to providing information and different perspectives on this particular issue, the committee, while saying that it was an issue that should be dealt with, did not make any specific recommendations. So as the members across the way already know, we are following up with a small committee to look at that particular set of recommendations and discuss with stakeholders across the province the specifics in terms of forming a recommendation and following up on it.

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

Organized Crime

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About a year ago the Minister of Justice announced an organized crime strategy for Alberta. This coming weekend the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of justice will be meeting in Vancouver. Could the Minister of Justice tell me what Alberta's position is in relation to organized crime initiatives at this upcoming meeting?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, organized crime will form a major part of the agenda and discussions on what we can do across the country to combat organized crime. Alberta has been very proactive on this issue. We would like to see greater co-operation across the country, greater resource sharing and focusing of expertise. We've got a long way to go. Gangs in this country are organized on an interprovincial and international basis. Organized crime is not confined to one province, so there needs to be a much more co-ordinated strategy. Alberta is pushing for it.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: do we not already have organizations in place to do this type of work?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hoping to encourage provinces to co-ordinate with a new body to share information between police services but, also, to go beyond that and

share information and resources between prosecutorial offices and other expertise so that we can work together to combat organized crime.

MR. MARZ: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: could the minister tell me how much money we're talking about to fund this initiative?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's not just new money that's needed. It would be helpful to have provinces put money into this area. Alberta put \$8 million in last year, and that \$8 million investment has already paid dividends. But we're not just looking for new money in the area. What we're talking about is a refocusing of resources in this particularly important area. When our kids in our schools get drugs, it's as a result of organized crime, because it's the organized crime networks that bring those drugs into our country. We all have to work together to combat that.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has created the deep suffering in health care, and the government's privatization scheme is going to throw the doors wide open to two-tiered health care, yet the Premier and the minister refuse to admit it. The only real choice this scheme will give Albertans is the method of payment they will use: cash, credit, or debit. We know that out-of-pocket costs to Albertans are costing more and more each year. My questions are to the minister of health. Given that in 1998 total private health care spending in Alberta – that's out-of-pocket costs for Albertans – was 31 percent, the highest level among the provinces, how much more will your new privatization scheme cost Albertans? Fifty percent, 75 percent, 100 percent?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, given that our overall policy statement clearly indicates that we will be providing insured services at no cost to the public and given that we will bring in under the public administration and public funding of the health care system contractual relationships where it is indicated as being advantageous through a cost-benefit study and we will continue as a province to offer near the widest range of coverage to the Alberta public as any part of this country as far as that overall set of core publicly funded services, it will not cost them any more, except, of course, through their taxation support of all government services, of which health is a major one, than it does today.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the government continues to delist services and the rate of private health care spending has increased by 25 percent over the past seven years – that's out-of-pocket costs to Albertans have increased, and again it's the highest rate of growth amongst all the provinces – what are your projections for the rate of increase expected under your new privatization scheme? Thirty percent, 75 percent? What's the increase?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the rate of increase to the public of the province in that area that is determined by government – that is, the overall tax load of the province – will increase or, as it is right now, decrease in a number of areas as far as our take, so to speak, or our requirements of the public for funding health care. But as far as

the health care budget is concerned, it has been increased very, very, significantly to provide that comprehensive coverage that we do have in this province, which goes far beyond the very specific area of insured services covered by the Canada Health Act.

I think really the hon. member's comments across the way are a bit misleading, but that's unparliamentary, so I would just ask her to reflect on the very fact that in Alberta we cover a wider range of services, a far wider range of services than are narrowly defined under the Canada Health Act.

MS LEIBOVICI: Yet our out-of-pocket costs keep increasing.

Will the minister admit that his government's plan to privatize medicare can only continue to substantially increase the out-of-pocket costs to Albertans, those costs that are now covered under the Alberta health care insurance plan but that you can delist?

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, the priority that government has placed on health care is clearly indicated by the fact that in Alberta we provide full coverage of insured services plus coverage through the budget and the programs of Alberta Health and Wellness that go far beyond the parameters outlined in the Canada Health Act.

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

Motor Vehicle Accident Prevention

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the growth of traffic volume in Alberta, particularly in Calgary, there are concerns from my constituents. The concerns are not only with the traffic control penalties but about the prevention of accidents, improving driving education and drivers' attitudes. My question today is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Could the minister update Albertans on the accident prevention programs?

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Persons must pass a written exam and also pass a driving test to demonstrate not only their knowledge but skill and handling of the vehicle. Once they pass both tests, they are then given the privilege of a driver's licence in the province of Alberta.

There are a number of other choices that potential drivers make in the province. That is taking driver courses but also taking additional defensive driving courses as well. As you know, insurance is compulsory in the province of Alberta, and many insurance companies do offer incentives for drivers that have taken and completed a driving course.

There are also other committees that have been put in place by constituents in various parts of the province. One is the highway 43 safety committee, which involves the University of Alberta, stakeholders within the Grande Prairie area, the police, the RCMP, and they, too, are doing whatever they can to introduce some safe driving programs for drivers in the province of Alberta.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental is also to the same minister. There are concerns about bad driving behaviours expressed on the road. Could the minister update Albertans on programs dealing with bad driving behaviour that could result in dangerous situations such as road rage that occur in other major cities?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that ongoing education and enforcement of traffic laws are necessary to improve

traffic safety. That is why under a previous ministership a traffic safety initiative was launched in 1996 which included four components. Those were information awareness, that centred around education, standards, and also enforcement. The name of the public campaign was Think and Drive: Safety Starts with You. The key purpose of this program is to get the information out to all Albertans, to all drivers, talk about poor driving habits, some of the issues centred around those drivers that don't have the necessary skills or the experience, the consequences of breaking the law, and also talking about road rage and how to prevent it.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question is to the same minister. There were some tragic and deadly accidents recently in Calgary. My constituents are concerned about the quality of driver education and how easy it is to get a driver's licence. Could the minister update Albertans on the efforts to enforce the process of driver licensing to ensure the high quality of drivers?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we have some statistics that we're not particularly proud of. As more and more people move to Alberta, we have more cars on the road and traffic issues centred around some of the growth in the major cities. Last year we had 429 fatalities, but 89 percent of those fatalities were reportedly due to driver error, people that really weren't paying attention.

As a result, we are now working on the graduated licensing program, which will impose certain restrictions on inexperienced new drivers. With further consultation, we will have that program ready, hopefully, by sometime in early 2001.

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

Hospital Closures

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People in the Didsbury area are worried that RHA No. 5 has plans to turn their acute care hospital into a long-term care facility. People in the community are worried about losing their hospital. They want to know what is happening, and their RHA isn't giving them any details. So my questions are to the minister of health. Why would the government want to close a hospital that has two top-quality operating rooms in an area where the population is rapidly growing?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have not had the opportunity, although I'm aware of this particular proposal, to discuss this with the chair and the board of the regional health authority. The one thing, however, that I do know is important here is that this, as I understand it at this point in time, is a proposal which has been presented by the chair of the regional health authority; that is, No. 5. There'll be a process of listening or consultation, and they're looking at April in terms of any action being taken.

MRS. SOETAERT: Mr. Speaker, if I understand the minister correctly, he is saying that in April the RHA is going to tell them what is happening. The people would like some information right now, and the RHA won't give them a thing. It has been very secretive. I'd like you to address that issue for them. They want information from your department. Is that possible?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is far ahead of the hon. member across the way in making representation on this particular point. I think that should be emphasized. I have undertaken, with the hon. Member for Olds-

Didsbury-Three Hills, to inquire into this, to look very carefully at how they propose to arrive at a decision and whether this is appropriate or not and what the discussion process will be.

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

Education Funding

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today my questions are to the Minister of Learning. I'm seeking clarification, Mr. Minister, for three of my educational stakeholders. From Clive school council: what can this school use the dollars for from their allocated share of the announced \$151 million? One letter to them from you stated that funds were unconditional and could be used for their own priorities. A second letter said that dollars must be used for capital. Could you please clarify?

DR. OBERG: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we do not want the \$151 million used for ongoing operational costs. Because they're onetime only dollars, we felt that they should not be used for that. They have to be used to eliminate the deficit, and that's something that we have told all school boards.

Second of all, the school boards do have the flexibility on how to use their dollars. It is up to the school boards to set their priorities and utilize those dollars according to that. Mr. Speaker, we would encourage them to use it on infrastructure, although it is not a necessity that those dollars be used on infrastructure. Rather, it is to be used on the school board's priorities.

The other kicker in all of this, Mr. Speaker, is that I must okay every grant application that comes in. So I will be looking at them. Up until this time we have okayed for things such as band uniforms, such as computers, such as upgrades to infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, that's a very long answer to the question. The answer is yes, they have the flexibility.

MRS. GORDON: From Muir school council: what is the status of the central Alberta regional consortium? Will you continue funding in the long term this much needed and utilized resource?

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, the answer is yes. Last weekend we made the announcement that there would be a continued \$500,000 for the regional consortia around the province. The six regional consortia will continue to provide professional development to the teachers.

2:30

MRS. GORDON: My third question is to the Minister of Infrastructure, and it's from the Wolf Creek regional school division. When will you be announcing capital funds for school buildings, both new and renos? The school division has high-growth areas needing high-growth help.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, all capital applications should be in before December 31, 1999. The school facilities branch is going to review all those applications and will be making those announcements early in the year 2000.

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

Provincial Fiscal Policies

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the province

was treated to, in essence, a new budget when the Provincial Treasurer brought down the province's second-quarter budget update. It was chock full of corrections and some new information. For example, we found that Alberta Treasury ranked ninth amongst 12 forecasters in predicting crude oil prices, and it ranked dead last amongst seven forecasters in predicting natural gas prices for the 1999 calendar year. The Provincial Treasurer has talked about his difficulty in predicting revenues because of revenue volatility. Well, in the past three years the Provincial Treasurer has made expenditure volatility a reality in this province as well. My questions today are to the chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Can the chair of the standing committee tell Albertans the last time a government brought in \$1.4 billion in unbudgeted spending between the budget and the second-quarter update?

Speaker's Ruling Questions to Committee Chairmen

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, the chair of Public Accounts is an official of the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta, but that committee meets publicly in this Assembly quite periodically, and it's really not within the normal purview of questions to go to such chairmen other than to deal with matters associated with scheduling and the like.

MR. DICKSON: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Okay, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo. Let's deal with the point of order.

Point of Order Questions to Committee Chairmen

MR. DICKSON: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd cite the precedent set on April 13, 1994, when the then Member for Edmonton-Roper put a question to the chair of the Public Accounts committee. It was a substantive question that dealt not with the scheduling of when that committee was going to meet but, in fact, with the substance of what that standing committee dealt with.

In fact, it's my respectful submission, sir, that your responsibility is to apply the customs and traditions of this Assembly. There is ample precedent for questions being put not simply to the chair of this particular standing committee but to other standing policy committees. For the purpose of eliciting information for the benefit of Albertans on issues that are urgent and relevant, I strongly submit, sir, that the opportunity should be provided.

Thank you.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I think this is a ludicrous position that's being taken, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora raising a question to a member of his own caucus. Question period is set aside . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, please. This serious point of order has been raised, and we're hearing the point of order now as per the advice I provided in the Assembly last Thursday.

The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The members of the opposition responded to the first part of my sentence and didn't allow me to go on to the balance of my sentence. The purpose of question period is to ask the government, i.e. Executive Council, to

hold them accountable for what government is doing in the Legislature. Through the whole parliamentary tradition that's clearly the purpose of question period, to hold Executive Council, to hold the government accountable to the Legislature.

Now, clearly the chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, as you quite rightly pointed out, is an officer of the Legislature. He is clearly not a member of Executive Council, undoubtedly never will be a member of Executive Council, has absolutely no knowledge of the policies or the operations of government. It is totally inappropriate for a question of that nature to be put in this Chamber to the chairman of Public Accounts.

As you quite properly pointed out, Mr. Speaker, it is perfectly appropriate for Public Accounts to meet during the period of time that the Legislature is in session. For Public Accounts to meet . . .

MRS. NELSON: They're meeting tomorrow.

MR. HANCOCK: Is it meeting tomorrow? Public Accounts is meeting tomorrow. The question can be raised at Public Accounts tomorrow of the chair of Public Accounts.

The member clearly can go to Public Accounts and ask any question that he wants to at Public Accounts, but it's clearly the parliamentary tradition that the purpose of question period is to hold members of Executive Council, to hold the government of Alberta accountable for what they're doing in this Legislature, to bring members of Executive Council to account in the Legislature for what we're doing in terms of government policy.

Mr. Speaker, that question is clearly out of order.

THE SPEAKER: The Provincial Treasurer on this point of order.

MR. DAY: Absolutely. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Further to the point of order, what we're seeing today is quite an offence to this whole process of question period. In fact, what has happened is that the opposition critic has stood up and, not wanting to ask me the question, has put out some information that is highly debatable. Highly debatable. Then instead of engaging me in the debate, he has run from that and tossed the question to his own member. It's a very offensive tactic. We would prefer to engage in the debate, not to duck the debate, on information that he just released, which is highly debatable information.

THE SPEAKER: Anyone else on the point of order? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder on this point of order.

MR. WHITE: As the chair of that committee, sir, I'd like to add my arguments. The question was asked of the chair as an officer of this Chamber. In fact, the question was asked of history. If you'll read the question carefully, it was a question of history, and who better to answer the questions raised by the members in an open committee than one that has had to sit in the chair to study those papers exactly? Sir, I know no better person in this Legislative Assembly to answer those questions.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I think, hon. members, first of all, let me just go whoa and make some comments on the comments in reverse order. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder, there's absolutely no hesitation in the mind of the chair of this particular Legislative Assembly that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder is, indeed, a very knowledgeable gentleman. That goes without saying. The hon. member may be in a fine position to answer questions, but this Legislative Assembly, governed by its history, its tradition, its Standing Orders clearly recognizes that the chairman of the Public

Accounts Committee can convene his committee virtually 300 times a year if he chooses to, and many and ample opportunities are provided for that type of question to be addressed to him.

I'll alert all the citizens of Alberta that tomorrow morning at 9:30 in this particular facility . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Eight thirty.

THE SPEAKER: At 8:30 tomorrow morning the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee will be convening a meeting of Public Accounts, and should such questions want to be addressed, they can certainly do that.

Now, hon. Provincial Treasurer, thank you for your contribution to this discussion. Hon. Government House Leader, thank you for the point you made. Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, thank you for the points that you made.

I think we'll wrap up the point of order with this summation. It normally has been the tradition of our Assembly that questions to members other than those of Executive Council would simply deal with administrative matters of that particular committee and scheduling matters and the like but not deal with matters of a policy nature and the like.

Again, I'll conclude where I began. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Calder should be very pleased with his exhaustive knowledge of the history of the province of Alberta and should invite all additional members to meet with him tomorrow morning at 8:30 to further review this particular matter.

The time for question period has now elapsed.

THE CLERK: Members' Statements. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, the question period is lapsed. [interjections] Please sit down. [interjections] Sit down. [interjections] Sit down right now. The time for question period has elapsed.

Statements were made in this Assembly last Thursday about what I would do. It was clearly offered, clearly given out. In fact, I was going to congratulate hon. members today for allowing 11 hon. members to have questions in question period and congratulate those members who abided by the traditions. The time for the question period has now elapsed.

Hon. members, before we go to the next item on our agenda, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

head: Introduction of Guests

2:40 (reversion)

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to rise and introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly five individuals sitting in the public gallery today. They participated in a protest rally at noon in front of Canada Place to express solidarity with a hundred thousand other protesters who were gathered today in Seattle to protest the WTO negotiations. The names of the guests are John Vanalten, Nicki Liphon, Richard St. Amant, Chris Germain, and Kerri Charest. I'd ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly employees of the Bethany Care Centre in Cochrane. They are Laurie Amer, Cheryl Bango, Jill Bryant, Heather Dyck, Kim Forster, Bev Ireton, Marlis McDouall, Linda Molstad, Doreen Mortimer, Karla Palaj, Amanda Perka, Connie Peterson, Regina Schoett, Val Stajskal, Carol Tardif, Dana Van Iderstine, Rita Weeres,Carolynn Wheeler, Lise Widahl, Kim Woodcock, Eileen Young, and Anna Bigelow. If I could ask them to stand in the public gallery and receive the very warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: In 30 seconds from now, hon. members, I'll call on the first of three hon. members to participate. We'll go first of all with the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, then the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, then the hon. Member for Calgary-West.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to raise a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: No, I haven't recognized you. Sit down. I have not recognized you. We're now in the process of Members' Statements.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Domestic Violence

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the conclusion of the month that we recognize family violence I would like to bring to the floor of this Assembly the details of Justice Working, a co-ordinated criminal justice system response to domestic violence. The Justice Working project is the co-ordinated and integrated criminal justice, social services, health services, and community-based response to high-need women who are victims of domestic violence. It has been designed to address the risk factors and effects associated with violence by an intimate partner, such as isolation, alcohol or substance abuse, depression, fear of crime, and challenges to parental skills.

Mr. Speaker, the costs of domestic violence are high in terms of personal well-being, self-esteem, safety, and monetary costs to a range of institutions that include our public and mental health systems, education, social services, police, courts, and correctional services. A growing body of literature demonstrates that children who come from families with a history of violence exhibit increased aggressive behaviour and a high propensity for interpersonal violence.

Mr. Speaker, this project is a four-year demonstration pilot project developed by the Action Committee against Violence and the Calgary Justice Working Committee. It proposed significant changes to how the criminal justice system responds to domestic violence. This includes the creation of victim advocates who will assist victims in their participation in the justice process and in connecting with the existing services in their community. Included are the expansion of the domestic conflict unit of the Calgary city police, the creation of a specialized docket court and Crown prosecutors, specialized duty counsel, specialized probation officers who focus on victim safety and ensure accountability of the offender, expanded and culturally appropriate treatment services for offenders, victims, and children, and the integration of community services, including law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and community support services.

I would like to take a moment just to thank the organizers of the Calgary Justice Working Committee. Their membership includes a

number of people whose names I will table when time permits me to do so, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the work of this committee on behalf of the issue of family violence in our community.

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

Highway 4

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There has been much controversy in Milk River over the location of the new route for highway 4. The highway that currently runs through the town needs to bypass the urban area to enable twinning and a constant 110 kilometres per hour speed limit. Alberta transportation originally approved a route that bypassed the town on the east, but about a year ago a small group of people met with the government, and suddenly the route changed. This change will drastically affect those who live and farm along the new westerly route.

Some townspeople are incensed with the undemocratic way in which the route was changed. They also query an evaluation of three different route options. The executive summary of the report that was completed last June suggests that the western route is cheaper. However, the executive report did not specify whether costs included the buyout of several farms and homes. I've been denied access to the full report and shall continue to wonder if political pressures came into play to change the route to the west side of the town.

I wonder if the Minister of Infrastructure weighed the financial and emotional costs of displacing families and farms as compared to displacing dirt. I wonder if he read the full report or relied on the executive summary before making his conclusions. Many letters have been sent to the Minister of Infrastructure asking him to choose an easterly route because of increased hazards and delays caused by the intersecting rail lines with highway 4.

This issue has divided the community. Nothing strong is built on division. I urge the minister to rethink his decision and to reconsider the route for the highway.

International Year of Older Persons

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and address the Assembly regarding the International Year of Older Persons. On October 1, 1998, the Premier launched Alberta's IYOP campaign in Lethbridge. Since then Alberta communities have hosted thousands of activities and events to celebrate the contributions of seniors. As chair of the seniors council for Alberta and as an MLA I often meet with Alberta seniors and discuss many different issues. I'm always impressed by the wisdom, experience, and humour that seniors bring to our discussions. I am certain that all of the members of this Assembly have had similar experiences.

Seniors are one of the province's finest natural resources. As the number of seniors in the province continues to grow, Albertans of all ages will benefit from the strength that seniors bring to our communities. Statistics tell us that the number of seniors in Alberta is in fact rapidly increasing. As a result, the provincial government chose to study the impact of our aging population during 1999. I have had the honour of chairing the steering committee which began looking at this important topic. The Member for Leduc serves as vice-chair of this committee. I'm proud to help make Alberta the first province in Canada to study this issue in such a comprehensive way.

The committee thus far has studied the impact of the aging population by reviewing current seniors' programs and services, then consulting with Albertans on their vision of the future. Through the study they have provided valuable input that will help us ensure that

the province's programs and services are appropriate for a much larger number of seniors in the future. During IYOP Albertans have had the opportunity to recognize and thank seniors for their contributions to the province.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the increased awareness of seniors created during IYOP will help ensure that Alberta remains a province and a society for people of all ages for many years to come. I encourage the members of this Assembly and all Albertans to encourage and help seniors remain active members of our communities so that they do not miss out on the opportunities of the wonderful province they helped build.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, you have a Standing Order 13(2) request?

Point of Order

Explanation of Speaker's Ruling

MR. DICKSON: I do indeed, Mr. Speaker. As long as I've been a member of this Assembly, the practice and custom has been that if a member is on his feet in question period, having commenced his series of original question and two supplementaries, even though the time expires that member then would be permitted as an invariable practice to complete asking the other two questions.

Now, your ruling is clear in terms of an ineligible respondent, and I expect and understand that ruling, but why would it be that my colleague or, indeed, any member would then be deprived of the opportunity to ask the two additional questions, which, as I say, has been, I think, the invariable practice of this Assembly, at least in the seven-plus years that I've been a member of it?

Thank you.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Official Opposition House Leader, the purpose of the chair and the purpose of Standing Orders and the purpose of history and tradition and everything else in here provides for some subjectivities with respect to certain things. The hon. Official Opposition House Leader might want to look at Standing Order 2.

In all contingencies unprovided for, the question shall be decided by the Speaker and, in making a ruling, the Speaker shall base any decision on the usages and precedents of the Assembly and on parliamentary tradition.

As all hon. members know, this chairman has said from time to time and time and time again that parliamentary decorum is very pronounced to him. It's the first responsibility, the decorum of the House and the maintaining of it.

The second major concern that this chairman has is to allow as many opportunities as there are for private members to raise questions within the question period. In fact, today was a good day in terms of some advancement with respect to this. This is the largest number of sets of questions that we've had in this Assembly in this session, in the last seven or eight days, and in fact the chair was putting down some ticks and was going to make some really, really positive comments about offering opportunities for private members to have questions in the House.

The chair also rose last Thursday, and if there's any, any doubt at all about what the chair said last Thursday, just kindly read *Hansard* again. He said that it was time to move on and time to make sure that decorum was re-established in this House and there was time to allow an opportunity for all members to proceed and get involved.

So at about the 12th set of questions this afternoon one hon. member rose and addressed a question to another hon. member who is not a member of Executive Council. The chair said last Thursday

that there would be subjective opportunities taken to deal with points of order within the time provided for the question period. By the time this matter was dealt with, the time for the question period had elapsed. No first question had been recognized; no first question had been made available to anybody. There was a point of order submission with respect to this, and a very subjective decision within the rules was provided by the chairman, which this chairman will do in order to maintain decorum. The importance of this Assembly is to in fact work within the rules, not attempt to find where the edge of the rules are and stick one foot over. That's a classroom activity, and there are many teachers in this room who would allow their little Johnnies and Marys to put their toes across the line and let it go, and the next day the line would get farther out. Some do not subscribe to that theory.

We're all honourable people. The purpose of the question period is to obtain information. The matter was raised, the matter was dealt with during the question period, the matter was discussed, resolved, and finished, and the time for question period elapsed without a question being in order on that particular set, and that's where this matter ends, hon. member.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Public Bills and Orders Other than
head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 208
Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I will call on the sponsor of the bill, the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in committee to Bill 208, the Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act, and to introduce the amendments, which are being distributed to all members.

I have reviewed the speeches from second reading and note strong support for the principles of this bill. Through the suggestions and comments that have been made, I have noted, first of all, the importance of this legislation as it becomes a part of a comprehensive approach to address the various serious problems of youth tobacco use. I also noted that this legislation complements the already existing federal legislation that is deficient in the area of youth tobacco consumption. There is also an expression in some of the speeches that they preferred that possession be included in the bill. Finally, I've noted that there was strong support for a partnership approach, including the communities of health, education, justice, government, business, children's services, parents, and of course students themselves.

Since second reading I have met with many of these stakeholders that I just mentioned, particularly in my constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. Both communities supported a plan to proceed to co-operatively develop an interstakeholder partnership plan to solve this problem.

3:00

In fact, I have a letter from the Crossroads regional health authority indicating their support and willingness to be involved in any pilot project. I also have a letter from the Capital health authority indicating their support, and I just received the other day

more than 122 letters of support from University of Alberta medical students. I also received a letter of support from ATRA, the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Alliance.

Above all, from the research and work that I have done, I conclude that our society has a very big problem with youth smoking. It's a very expensive problem. The problem is growing. It's getting worse. The polls indicate that the citizens of our province expect something to be done about it, and finally this is but one very important step in providing legislation that will enable stakeholders to effectively combat the problem.

So with those introductory comments, Madam Chairman – the amendments have now been handed out – I would like to propose, first of all, amendment B on the sheet, if that's okay. If we could take that amendment first.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We will name that amendment A1. We'll call B amendment A1.

MR. JOHNSON: So B is A1? Okay.

This amendment does not change the purpose of the bill, which, of course, is to enable Alberta communities to tackle the problem of youth smoking with an effective and inexpensive strategy that has proven to reduce the incidence of youth tobacco consumption. This amendment then reads as follows:

4.1 This Act applies to those parts of Alberta prescribed by a regulation made by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

This amendment enables communities within Alberta to establish pilot projects through regulation. This way comprehensive programs patterned after the Woodridge model in Illinois can be set up, and the enforcement of this act would operate merely as one component of the overall approach.

To refresh members' memories, the three pillars include federal restrictions on retailers against selling tobacco to youth; that is, restricting the supply. Number two, restrictions on youth against using tobacco; that is, demand control and interstakeholder involvement in education programs and raising awareness of the hazards of tobacco use, shall we say education and prevention. This amendment allows a measure of flexibility for communities, likely through the leadership of regional health authorities, to properly establish antitobacco programs within Alberta communities that would be supported by this legislation.

I know there is interest in establishing a Woodridge-style approach involving all stakeholders, including health, children's services, education, schools, police, business, parents, and youth. This amendment would allow regional health authorities or other local stakeholders to develop strategies for comprehensive community involvement and program planning. It also allows for flexibility with a strong community base for legislation to be effective.

Madam Chairman, with that I'll listen to any comments that other members may wish to make.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I rise to speak in Committee of the Whole to Bill 208 and in particular to the amendment that has been put forward by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. The amendment addresses some of the concerns that I and some of my colleagues had brought up in the second reading of this particular bill, and that dealt with the difficulty of enforcement in some areas of the province. What the amendment, it's my understanding, will do is allow for pilot projects, as the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose had indicated, to occur in those parts of the province that are ready for those particular pilot projects.

We know that tobacco use amongst younger smokers is an

increasing growth sector for the tobacco industry. I believe that one way of reducing our health care costs is to ensure that smokers, who are starting at younger and younger ages, are dissuaded by whatever means possible from starting the habit of smoking. It appears from some of the recent studies done on Woodridge that the program has in fact been successful, and it's been successful because of a combination of reasons. One is the retailer compliance, the other is the education section, and the third is the youth antipossession law.

The only concern I have – and I've been assured by the mover of this bill – is with regards to the issue of legality re a discipline or a penalty that's provided in one part of the province versus another part of the province. It's my understanding that Parliamentary Counsel has indicated that, in fact, that is not a problem and we can have different penalties that occur in different parts of the province. I would just like some clarification. I guess it will be addressed in the regulation. I would appreciate that the regulation address that particular issue. What happens if there is a youth from perhaps the Edmonton region that travels, let's say, to Camrose and is not aware of the regulation being in place and has cigarettes on their person? Would there be the ability to have a defence made that in fact they were unaware of the regulations or would not have been fined in their own location? That is one question I do have. However, as I indicated, I have been assured that that issue was dealt with. I would just like to hear those assurances or see the responses in the Assembly as well.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I wish to offer a few comments and observations in support of both amendments, but I will restrict myself to amendment A1 that's before us, to this Bill 208. I again commend the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for moving this bill and moving it forward.

The first amendment, A1, makes it clear that this bill is not mandatory but enabling. It will enable a community in Alberta to undertake a community effort to seriously reduce tobacco use by their children. The successful community that much of this is modeled on did exactly that. It enables, then, a community to make up its mind that it's going to protect its own children.

The bill is very timely, Madam Chairman, because the news media in the past several weeks has been giving wide coverage to the deliberate targeting of tobacco advertising to entice young people into becoming lifetime tobacco consumers. This Bill 208, if amended, will empower Alberta's communities to take action. The amendment empowers these communities who are committed to reduce tobacco use among their youth and enables them to take positive action. A community that chooses to do this naturally would need to have the involvement and support of the elected municipal council, the school board, parent councils, student bodies, as well as the police before they could initiate the empowering legislation that is provided here to help their youth avoid becoming addicted to nicotine from the tobacco products that are so widely advertised.

The second amendment, I suggest, is commendable in that it just gives the communities a powerful tool, but I'll deal with that later.

This amendment and the bill itself will enable a community, then, to make a united effort to come together, including their local governing bodies, businesses, police, schools, churches, local health authorities, school councils, and parents to make a successful youth tobacco program that would be similar to the Woodridge, Illinois, program.

I support this amendment and encourage all hon. members to support it as well.

3:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I regretfully am unable to support the amendment or the proposed bill this afternoon, and it is for these reasons. This government stood last week in this Assembly when two reports were tabled about poverty in Alberta communities and dismissed them as being old, outdated, done by an external group and wanted absolutely nothing to do with addressing poverty in Alberta. One of the contributing factors to smoking – and I think the research has more than amply proven this – is that if you place a young child in an environment that is impoverished and you couple that with an environment where there's a high rate of dropout, a high rate of unemployment, and you fuel that environment with a system where tobacco companies are allowed to advertise and target these young people with virtually no restrictions put in place by the provincial government of the day, what use is it to bring forward a punitive and punishing piece of legislation, to increase the workload on our police officers and go out and charge underage individuals for the possession of tobacco products? I would like to hear an answer to that.

This bill is nothing more than an offloading of responsibility, offloading of this government's responsibility when they want to ignore all of these negative components and environments in which young people are being raised in this province. They want to completely turn a blind eye to that. It reminds me, Madam Chairman, of the same philosophical intent that has arisen now in a couple of other pieces of legislation. One is to do with the prostitution act. Yet again we don't want to address the fact that many of these young women might be raised in poverty, that they might be raised with abuse. We don't want to talk or discuss that, but we're more than prepared to arrest them if they're participating in an act we would see as being inappropriate.

The same with recent charges that were placed against the parents of a child who was run over in the city of Edmonton. Even though that child was known to this government and they thereby had a responsibility in this regard, we saw a punitive action being taken rather than a focus that would be preventative, long-term, and all round more healthy than what is proposed this afternoon.

I challenge the sponsoring member. There is very little reference, if at all, to what kinds of supports and funding would be put in place to actually, in a meaningful way, contribute to this bill making a difference. We see our health system and our justice system both constrained in this province. We've had motions brought forward to increase the number of police officers in our community. The government refuses to endorse that type of motion but then brings forward a bill that says that in addition to all of the other workload expectations we have for police officers, we are going to expect you to police and charge underage youth with the possession of tobacco products.

I don't believe the hon. member has raised any of the absolutely extensive issues that this bill would propose with respect to the collection of the fines or court issues, raising another appropriate point. We have a justice system now where the ability to access a court date in a reasonable length of time is constrained at best. Now we are proposing that that system be further burdened, Madam Chairman, with charges from youth.

Now, I'd like the hon. member to just tell me how. How does it help a family – they're already living in poverty – to charge a child a hundred dollars or whatever you want to make the fee, charge that family another hundred dollars, put them further down the hole, and then harass them, have collection agencies harassing them about

paying a fine for the possession of tobacco? Meanwhile, we do absolutely nothing as legislators to talk about the increasing focused, targeted campaigns of tobacco companies on young people in this country.

Now, we've seen the federal government show some spine on this issue. I have not seen a member here talk about coupling this kind of initiative with some legislation that would in fact restrict the focus of advertising and marketing campaigns of tobacco companies. That's the kind of meaningful legislation we need in this province, not a punitive piece of legislation which is only going to further burden police officers, further burden our court systems, further burden impoverished people, and further burden our health systems. Regrettably, it is becoming a recognizable trend of this government. They don't want to have anything to do as society's representative with all of these less than pleasant details that exist in Alberta communities, but they're more than willing to bring down the heavy hand and place that heavy hand on youths and their families in the context of Bill 208.

So if the hon. member would like to complement this bill with an amendment that would address and restrict tobacco companies' advertising, I'd be more than pleased this afternoon to stand up and support it. But in its current form, Madam Chairman, I am absolutely, unequivocally not supporting this bill or amendment.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I have to make a couple of comments in relation to this bill. I want to say at the outset that I understand what the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose is attempting to do with this piece of legislation, and I also understand that I and other people in my caucus do not want youth to smoke. However, there are a number of issues here.

This particular amendment talks about

2 No person under the age of 18 . . . may

(a) possess, or

(b) smoke or otherwise consume

tobacco products in a public place.

I contrast that to the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act. That particular act, under section 3(1)(b)(ii), states that a director may

release the child if the child has attained the age of 16 years and in the opinion of the director the child is capable of providing for the child's own needs and safety.

I contrast that, Madam Chairman, to this private member's bill where we're saying that we're not going to allow people under the age of 18 years to smoke or consume tobacco products in a public place, yet we'll turn kids back on the street at 17 and 18 years old to continue to work in the sex trade. So I have a huge problem with the whole notion that we want to be heavy handed with the use of tobacco, but we're not prepared to protect our kids up to the age of 18 under the PCHIP bill. That is a correlation that strikes me as rather odd.

I would rather see parental responsibility apply and have parents responsible for whether or not they're going to allow their children to smoke. That should not be a decision of this Legislature. That should not be posed in a bill that is going to make a decision that a parent may make or should make. I'm a little concerned that again we see this private member's bill certainly crossing into the parental responsibility that should exist.

3:20

Education and prevention, Madam Chairman, is the way to go.

The targeting of tobacco companies with their dynamite advertising campaigns focus toward youth and young adults. That's where we should be focusing our attention.

Again, I have to address the issue of who's going to police the tobacco crooks, being the kids. I haven't seen any commitment whatsoever to an increase in funding to any policing agency so they can have added manpower to now deal with all these tobacco crooks that are going to be out on the street. So, quite frankly, I have a little difficulty with that.

But I think the biggest thing for me is that we have a No. 1 bill put forward by the government, and we in fact brought forward the amendment to this particular section that allows for the release of children age 17 and 18 back into the community if they can look after themselves. Well, if we can say that they look after themselves in this bill, then why are we not allowing them to have the responsibility here, under this particular act?

I would also suggest to you that there are many rural kids who get caught up in the tobacco experience through the great advertising, through the rodeos and those kinds of things. There are lots of kids out there who are smoking and carrying their Skoal in their back pocket. I think that if their parents think it's okay for them to smoke, that's their decision. That's not a decision of this Legislature. You know, I wouldn't want to intrude on that aspect of parenting.

I think that if you really want to make a difference, you do like we have with drugs and you do like we have with drinking and driving, safe grads. Let's not forget that we have made tremendous strides in society towards educating youth about tobacco, and many of our youth are opting not to smoke, much more than when I was a kid. So I think we're making some inroads there, and I think we need to continue down this path.

So with that, Madam Chairman, I cannot support the bill. I think there are too many issues: the intrusion upon parental responsibility – I juxtapose this particular bill against what we're saying is okay for children under the PCHIP Act, and I haven't seen any commitment to increased funding for police. I haven't seen any commitment to targeting tobacco companies nor a continued commitment to education and prevention, and that's what we need to see.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Minister of Government Services and acting House leader.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to make a couple of comments on the amendment. I appreciate what the hon. member is trying to accomplish by this private bill. I know that tobacco bills have come forward many times, and it's been like cutting the dog's tail off an inch at a time to try and make some semblance of reality come into the dangers of tobacco and association with our young people.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview made the comment that government has not taken the bull by the horns, and I think she's right. I don't often agree with her, but Canadians by and large on this topic have been a bunch of wimps. They have not stood up and really dealt with the issue of tobacco square on. I think instead of continually dealing with this by cutting the dog's tail off an inch at a time, maybe we need to send a message to our federal government, because I know this is the debate today, that tobacco products maybe should just be banned from this country, and make that stand and realize that there are some tobacco hearings that are going on in the United States where they're talking about additives that have been put into the tobacco that are causing addictive habits more so than ever before. Maybe the solution is to quit making the, I think, almost hypocritical move every session to add something else and

face this thing square on and make a proposal that we band together as Canadian governments and say: stop it right now.

So I appreciate what the hon. member is trying to do with this amendment and with this bill, but I don't know that it's going to do the job. I would rather see Canadians for once quit being wimps and stand up and be firm and call a spade a spade on this topic and get it over with once and for all.

So with that, Madam Chairman, I'll take my place, and I guess it's almost time to call for the vote on the amendment.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Acting Government House Leader is asking for the vote on the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: What about amendment A2, hon. member?

MR. JOHNSON: I can present it.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, but you only have about one minute left today. It would have to go over till tomorrow, or we could call the question. Do you want to move A2, hon. member? Okay.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you very much. The other amendment I'm bringing forward is amendment A on the sheets that you have, which would include possession. Including possession would be more consistent with the original ordinance passed in Woodridge, Illinois. It is consistent with the Alberta School Boards' resolutions on tobacco and addresses concerns raised by the Calgary police force by making enforcement of the law more practical and clear. It clarifies that youth cannot purchase cigarettes and addresses the issue of youth selling or distributing cigarettes to other youth.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, the chair hesitates to interrupt you, but under Standing Orders we must rise and report progress so we can move on to Motions Other than Government Motions at 3:30. So we'll resume with A2 tomorrow.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Madam Chairman, I move that the committee now rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following: Bill 208. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

head: Motions Other than Government Motions
3:30

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

Mandatory School Curriculum Costs

515. Dr. Massey moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to provide additional resources to schools to cover the costs of textbooks, software, technology, learning materials, and teacher training that are required because of the introduction of a new curriculum mandated by the government.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will not be speaking to the motion as I find myself in a conflict of interest. In my former professional life I had authored and coauthored a number of textbooks which are still in use in the classrooms of the province, and I receive royalties for those texts. Because Motion 515 makes reference to textbooks I will not take part in the debate, and I will absent myself from the Chamber while Motion 515 is under discussion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, it will be duly noted, of course, in *Hansard*.

The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to respond to the private member's Motion 515, which would seek "to provide additional resources to schools," moved by the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

The member appears to be asking for allocations of additional resources to schools to cover any costs that are a result of an introduction of a new curriculum but seems to forget the numerous actions this government has already made in this regard. [Interjections] I will tell you soon. I am unable to support this motion, Madam Speaker, as funding has already been provided by Alberta Learning to assist with the implementation of the new curriculums and a resource guide was released to help prepare teachers for the implementation. It cannot be more obvious that the government has already provided additional resources. This motion is simply unnecessary.

Madam Speaker, our government has and continues to support Alberta's public education system, and that includes support for adjustments to curriculum changes as well as funding to deal with growing pressures and other identified costs. Our government has recognized the possible difficulties associated with implementation and has provided additional money for the new mathematics curriculum.

This motion is unnecessary and redundant. In March of this year the government announced an initiative that will provide \$2.2 million to support implementation of secondary mathematics courses. This money will be used to develop and deliver programs and resources that help teachers learn new ways to teach math and enhance student achievement. Training will also be developed for principals, guidance counselors, and parents to help them support student choice and student learning.

School boards also receive a credit of \$9.60 per pupil at the Learning Resources Distributing Center to reduce the cost of textbooks, calculators, and other materials by 25 percent. Madam Speaker, this credit is another clear demonstration that the government is already providing additional resources necessary to assist with the implementation of the new curriculum as well as resources necessary for students to excel in the new curriculum.

Madam Speaker, I would briefly like to outline what exactly is meant by curriculum changes and what has occurred here in Alberta. Certainly when we speak of curriculum changes in pure and applied math, it is something Albertans should be proud of. Developing a new educational curriculum started in 1994 as part of the western

Canadian protocol agreement, where the six western Canadian ministers agreed to pursue common instructional goals through partnership and by pooling human and fiscal resources.

While the focus has always been on education development at the local level, Canadians have common expectations of education where a collaborative approach is both appropriate and desirable. In this regard the ministers of education of the western provinces and territories declared their commitment to leadership in education through collaboration and basic education programs and services and signed a WCP agreement.

The central objective of the western Canadian protocol agreement is to provide uniform and quality education for all students from kindergarten to grade 12. The WCP operates so that a lead province is selected to conduct each activity. Priority is given to activities supported by all six jurisdictions, and each jurisdiction determines its level of participation in any given activity.

The WCP was developed for a variety of reasons. There was a concern about the duplication of efforts in each province in the area of curriculum development. It was also developed with the intent to share expertise in a period of scarce resources and to enhance the quality and accountability of the education system across Canada. WCP activities span a variety of concerns including curriculum, distance learning, special education, assessment, aboriginal education, and teacher preparation and certification.

The western Canadian protocol, with its method of choosing a lead province to deal with each educational subject, is a cost-effective method to deal with the need to update educational curriculums for the next century. The same effort that would be expended in each province is conducted once at a cost which is in excess of what any individual province would commit but which is far less than the cost of repeating a process six times, once in each jurisdiction.

The lead province for each curriculum project conducts a comparability study, a project proposed for common development, a curriculum framework, and a learning resource review. The main curriculum framework projects have been mathematics, led by Alberta; English language arts and French programs, led by Manitoba; special education and curriculums in a language other than English and French, led by Saskatchewan. The WCP represents a tremendous effort on the part of the western Canadian provinces to provide uniform, quality, and cost-effective education.

Madam Speaker, the only major curriculum change that has been implemented thus far is in the area of mathematics. Most specifically, it has been the creation of a new pure and applied mathematics curriculum. Applied math is a course that prepares students for careers or postsecondary studies that do not require calculus. It involves a greater use of problem solving and technology. Pure math prepares students for university programs that require calculus, such as engineering and science. Pure math 10 was implemented provincially in September 1998.

The reason school programs are revisited and updated is to ensure that young Albertans continue to receive a high quality education that prepares them for the future. The government recognizes that program changes can create financial concerns for school boards and their staff. One of the ways Alberta Learning has responded to these concerns is by reducing the extent of overall curriculum change in the 1990s. In this school year the only curriculum change for schools offering instruction in English is the requirement to offer pure mathematics 20. There are no changes in elementary or junior high school this year.

The Department of Learning has provided numerous in-service sessions on the new mathematics programs at locations across the province over the past four years to smooth the implementation

process. Other program changes like English language arts, health, and social studies have been delayed for one year to give school boards more time to prepare for these programs. The province gives school boards at least one year advance notice of new programs to help them plan for textbook purchases and teacher in-service.

3:40

Madam Speaker, the government goes to great lengths to ensure that the implementation of curriculum changes goes as smoothly as possible. Department of Learning staff are providing in-service sessions and co-ordinating arrangements with school systems, regional consortia, and other partners to help assist teachers with offering the new programs. To support implementation of the new English language arts program for kindergarten to grade 9, the province provided in-service for a lead teacher implementation team. In this model of in-service 33 teachers from across the province attended orientation and planning and development sessions. The department paid for expenses incurred by these teachers and their school boards to attend the program and also funded up to six days for each lead teacher's time so they could provide sessions for their colleagues.

In February 39 additional teachers attended a provincial training session on the new language arts program, with expenses covered by their school system. The results of this co-operative effort is a corps of over 70 teachers who can help their colleagues offer the new language arts curriculum. A similar approach is being used to prepare lead teachers for the new physical education program that schools will be implementing in September 2000.

Madam Speaker, the province is giving school boards appropriate funding to offer quality basic education for all students, including preparing teachers for implementation of new curriculum and for the purpose of textbooks and other instructional material that might be needed. The province determines the funding allocations to school boards by considering all available resources and Alberta's total student enrollment. Setting aside some of these funds for special earmarked grants for the introduction of new curriculum would reduce the total amount of funding available for distribution directly to school boards to use according to local needs and priorities.

This government takes its commitment to education very seriously. It is one of our most important mandates. We recognize that a high-quality education is one of the greatest gifts that we can give young people. We are willing to spend the money necessary to ensure that Alberta students have access to the best education possible, and that has been demonstrated in our recent budgets. By year 2001-2002 Albertans will see an increase of \$600 million in annual education spending. Total education spending will be \$3.74 billion by year 2001-2002. This increased funding reflects an unwavering commitment to Alberta's public education system. The \$600 million increase in education spending includes money for adjusting for new curriculum. Alberta School Boards request that funding be given in block grants rather than specifically for curriculum changes, as they are best suited to recognize the area of greatest need.

The government of Alberta spends a tremendous amount of money to support our education system. Education represents over 28 percent of the total program spending, the second largest government program expenditure after health care. The commitment in providing the Alberta public with the best possible education system is what has led Alberta Learning to become involved in collaboration like the WCP.

Over the next two to three years Alberta Learning will continue to collaborate with stakeholders and parents' groups to come up with the best curriculum possible. The government is committed to

graduating the best educated young people in Canada, and we are. Overall satisfaction with the quality of early childhood services to grade 12 education in Alberta remains very high among students and parents. Alberta's students are not only achieving the highest standards set for them, but they are also regularly outperforming students in other jurisdictions in both Canada and abroad.

We have a high-quality education system here in Alberta that is properly and adequately funded. To me what this motion implies is that the government is not properly funding education, and I must say that I take offence to that.

In conclusion, I would like to restate my opposition to Motion 515 and urge my colleagues to vote against it. Our government has already provided additional resources to schools to cover any costs associated with implementation of the new curriculum, \$2.2 million for math alone. Madam Speaker, I think the facts speak for themselves. Alberta Learning has worked in concert with other provinces to create a curriculum that will help our children receive the best education possible. In addition, we have provided the necessary funds to ensure the curriculum changes are properly implemented. Alberta Learning has already taken the necessary steps to implement curriculum changes; therefore, Motion 515 is redundant.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think the reality this afternoon is that the facts have been laundered and respun. My comments will reflect a reality that is starkly different from the reality that the hon. member across the way believes exists in Alberta. I believe to date members of this Assembly have tabled petitions with over 11,000 signatures clearly stating that the status of funding in this province is not sufficient to properly fund public education. For all my good colleague's statements this afternoon, for all his good intentions the marketing plan is not working. It is not working.

I'm reminded this afternoon of a statement that was made by Ralph Nader. He made it in the context of how you undermine a system. I'd like to apply that statement to the education system. "How do you bring down the system?" Nader asked.

Piecemeal it, chip away at it, Trojan horse it, starve its budget, squeeze out its services into the market place, generate more lack of public confidence in it, create more delays because of budget restrictions, don't even keep up with inflation or population growth.

That is the status of the public education system in Alberta today. Let the record be clear, and if there's any doubt, Madam Speaker, then let's actually ask some teachers, parents, and students in the system for their opinions.

The real agenda though is clear, and it is clear not only in this province but in jurisdictions across this country and in North America. Governments who have a tendency to lean towards corporatism and increased business involvement in schools are utilizing this approach, this agenda - underfunding, the restructuring - as a key component, a key piece of creating greater commercialism in our school system. They had to destabilize the system just as they did in health care and in order to create the fertile bed in which this business involvement and commercialization could take place. What the motion this afternoon is proposing to do is to strengthen our public school system to provide additional funding to cover the costs of switching to new curricula mandated by the province.

The reality is, though - and the hon. member certainly fleshed this out so that there is no doubt - that this government is not committed to strengthening the public education system because they are

committed to increasing business involvement and commercialism in our schools. It is, as well, a marketplace.

3:50

To add some additional thought to this debate this afternoon, it is worthy for the record to also incorporate a comment that was made recently by Angus Reid after conducting a national opinion poll on the question of the role of public schools.

There's a mechanistic school of thought that our learning institutions should simply crank out graduates who can fit right into the workplace. Some critics of our education system argue that less attention should be paid to such subjects as history, philosophy and literature and that more attention should be paid to assembling people with hard, practical skills . . .

The challenge for Canada's schools is not so much to prepare them for the workplace . . . The challenge is to stimulate the minds of people from all levels of society . . . if we are going to restructure our society to cope with new realities.

How will young Canadians know that the utter reliance on the private sector helped lead [this country] to the Great Depression if they don't even know that there was a Great Depression? How will they know how dangerous it is to blame minority groups for society's problems if they don't know the events that created the Third Reich? How will they know that the erosion of democratic principles in the interest of political efficiency was just what Mussolini had in mind when he said he wanted the trains to run on time?

Canada's young people must be educated in a way that keeps them open to all possibilities. Simplistic thinking isn't going to cut it . . . We have shrunk our governments and corporations; it is time to start expanding our minds

Now, the hon. Minister of Gaming wants to dispute this reality. So let me speak specifically to commercialization in Edmonton schools and provide some local examples to suggest that that is exactly the agenda of this government and that is exactly the reason why they won't provide adequate funding for curriculum changes.

There are many examples, and the concern is well expressed by an Edmonton teacher who, when presented with an unsolicited package entitled Block the Sun, Not the Fun educational programs, faces an ethical dilemma about whether to use the materials. On one hand, he asks: "What is the educational purpose of this? I think there's a hidden agenda." On the other hand, he's intrigued by the package and knows it will go over big with his students while teaching them something about sunburns.

The company Schering-Plow, which makes Coppertone, when challenged about the package, said that the ultimate goal here is to just promote the use of safe sun practices including sun screen. When asked about the need for the corporate logo, the response was: we believe education will lead to increased usage of sun screen, and we're hoping that if the message was brought to them by Coppertone, they would use Coppertone products. Exactly.

This targeting of children in order to develop product loyalty through curriculum is an obvious direction for corporations who are very much aware of the shortages of funding in public schools. Examples of other curriculum materials are most common. Procter & Gamble now provides a full environmental curriculum called Decision: Earth. The national potato board and the Snack Food Association sponsor a math unit. Imagine that, a math unit: count your chips. Maybe another slogan might be: count your M & Ms. The Canadian Bankers Association has produced a More than Money binder for grades 9 through 12, and Cadbury produced The Tale of the Great Bunny for an Easter campaign to liven up Easter. That is the kind of invasive marketing and commercialism that is already taking root in our public school system in this province, and it is wrong, Madam Speaker. It is wrong.

Let me just educate the hon. minister for science and technology about the real agenda. I would quote this afternoon from Maude Barlow and Heather-jane Robertson, who have published a book called *Class Warfare: the assault on Canadian schools*. They stated that North America's corporations have three fundamental goals for their preoccupation with an investment in schools: the first is to secure the ideological allegiance of young people to a free market world view on issues of the environment, corporate rights, and the role of government; the second is to gain market access to the hearts and minds of young consumers and to lucrative contracts in the education industry; the third is to transform schools into training centres producing a workforce suited to the needs of transnational organizations.

It is not about, Madam Speaker, creating a better society. It's not about fostering a broad and intelligent, thinking society. It all comes down to the ability of corporations to have status in the education system. These are not subtle changes or subtle initiatives. They're overt.

In fact, the motion that we have this afternoon before us, brought by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, speaks to the reality of this government's chronic underfunding of public education over the last five years and the fact that it was intended all along to allow this type of trend and initiative to take hold in our public system. That is the plan and that is the reality which the hon. member speaking off the top this afternoon doesn't want to acknowledge exists.

Now, it may also be worthy for the record to just speak briefly about some reports and statements that have been made in Alberta about the public education system and a concern that exists in some corporate minds about the stability and the commitment of this government to that system. Actually, I'm going to begin by citing a 1992 report, *Toward 2000 Together*, an international comparison in education. This report stated that our high dropout rate is a frequent complaint. Participants cited Alberta's high dropout rate of 30 percent and low literacy levels and that, in general, they believe that our education system is not functioning in tune with the times and is not providing the scientific and technical skills required for competing in the global marketplace. That assessment was in 1992, and there has been much cutting, underfunding, and restructuring of our system since then.

Further, the Conference Board of Canada in 1998 stated that increasing public awareness of the importance of education and a learning culture must be a priority, that all Canadians must become more aware of the link between good education and lifelong learning and their economic and social well-being, that literacy and skills for employability and self-employment need to be developed in our young people and continuously enhanced throughout their working lives, that the high school dropout rate is too high, that it takes too long for many students to complete their high school education, and that our performance on standardized tests should be better since we are among the highest spenders on education.

Madam Speaker, those thoughts also reflect the lack of transparency perhaps with which this government has spoken to their electorate, to Albertans, about their plans in public education.

4:00

I can speak as a parent who will be doing her first casino ever on December 18, not for my children's hockey teams, not for my daughter's riding class but for our public school. I will be spending December 18 in a casino here in Edmonton working to raise money to support the funding of curriculum and textbooks and other necessary components. [interjections] The hon. member across the way is being more than provocative. I don't know if he's worked a casino or not. I haven't worked a casino before, but I've worked a

few bingos, and I can tell you something. I can tell you that if we are committed to reducing the use of tobacco by young people, Madam Speaker, the very last place we'd want to be sending them is to casinos and bingo halls in this province, yet we have directions, that are being fueled by this government, that are placing more and more families in positions of having to do bingos and casinos to support public schools in this province.

I know that our school in west Edmonton is not the only one in this city that is having to do casinos. One of the reasons why parents, school councils are doing casinos is because people have become exhausted from doing chocolate sales and meat sales and gift wrap sales and calendar sales. I can also speak from experience in that regard. Last fall our family did 12 fund-raisers between September and January of the next year. Granted about half were for the school and half for related sports activities that our children are involved in, but the fact of the matter is that it is much more exhausting to peddle around to all of your family, friends, business associates, and colleagues in the Legislature all these types of materials. It's more exhausting to do that than to go and work at a casino. So as much as I am adamantly opposed to the proliferation of gambling in this province, I and many other parents are forced to do casinos to fund public education in Alberta. It is a sad state of affairs.

I could go on to some degree, Madam Speaker, but I think I've made my points this afternoon. The government's agenda is clear. Let the record show, and one day soon more Albertans will be aware of what their true agenda is with respect to public education. They'll recognize that they desire a government that is philosophically and ethically committed to the strengthening of the public education system in this province, and they will vote differently at the polls.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Motion 515, which urges the government to provide additional funding to schools due to the introduction of new curriculum. I agree with the criticism raised by my colleague for Redwater and, like him, am unable to support this motion.

My most basic criticism of Motion 515, Madam Speaker, is that it is redundant. In addition, it creates an incorrect perception about Alberta's education system. Our government has supported and continues to support Alberta's public education system, and that includes supports for adjustments and curriculum changes.

As my colleague noted, the changes in Alberta's curriculum have been staggered over time, and in fact the only change to the kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum that schools will see this year is the introduction of a new grade 11 math course. While there are certainly adjustments and challenges involved in such a change for students, teachers, and school boards, the introduction of this new course will hardly consist of an upheaval to the system or an unmanageable change. Further, Madam Speaker, this is a change that both our government and each of Alberta's school districts have been aware of for quite some time, and each has made plans to account for the costs involved with these changes. Schools are given at least one year's notice before any new programs are implemented so that they're able to plan for classroom and teacher training costs of these new programs.

In Alberta, the provision of education services is a shared responsibility between the province and the local school boards. The province provides the funding for education services but leaves school boards with the discretion as to how these funds are spent. There are certain block grants for basic classroom instruction as well

as other programs such as home schooling, ECS, early literacy, or severe disabilities, but the allocation of these funds beyond these basic categories is up to the school boards. School boards have the flexibility in managing their expenses within the board parameters of the funding framework.

Madam Speaker, I had the honour of spending about three weeks this summer with the Calgary public board of education reviewing some of the problems they're having with respect to funding. It's interesting to note that there were some things that could be done by this government to improve the situation for the school board. For example, special needs for severe disabilities was examined, and the minister responded and in fact provided more funding. English as a Second Language was another situation where they felt pressure, and the minister responded and in fact provided more funding. Also, the monthly funding issue instead of quarterly or biennially saved that particular board several million dollars.

The biggest problem that I encountered were with costs that can be managed by the school board. I'll give you an example. I'm going by memory, and I'm getting a little older, but I think the numbers will be fairly close. The biggest problem was certain clauses that they had to adhere to in their contracts. For example, one of them is the PTR. The difference between their PTR number and that of their sister board in Calgary makes it so that that board has to hire an additional thousand teachers compared to the other board. Also, if you look at certain requirements, such as if the Calgary board of education wanted to move teachers in order to create smaller classes in elementary and they had to move those teachers from the junior high division, they have restrictions as to how many teachers they can move. So in their case, yes, they did create smaller classrooms, but they had to hire beyond the PTR 200 additional teachers. So that little clause in the contract that says that you can't transfer more than 25 percent of your staff from one division to another cost that board an additional \$10 million.

So, Madam Speaker, it's not that the money isn't there, but you have to be able to control those expenses. Part of the problem with respect to the cost is that we're in a baby boomer situation right now. About 55 percent of our teachers currently are over the age of 45 and will be retiring within 10 years, so what we've got is a situation where the average cost per person is really high compared to other periods of time. But, again, this is a manageable cost, because what you can do is offer early retirement programs so that you can hire young teachers so that your average cost comes down.

Now, in the case of Calgary, they've done that now for a couple of years. If you in fact reduce your costs by a couple thousand dollars per person and you've got 5,000 people, that's another \$10 million. So there are many things that can be done to in fact manage the costs within a school board so that there's enough money for things like in-service training and new programs.

Madam Speaker, our government has recently clarified our funding position through the school council review report. This review, chaired by my colleague from Medicine Hat, received input from thousands of Albertans interested or involved in the education system on the strengths and weaknesses of school councils in the province. Created in 1995 under the School Act, school councils are comprised of a principal, one or more teachers, parents, a nonparent and community representative. Their role is an advisory one, one concerned with education issues and policies in that school. Overall the committee found that school councils are a valued and well-functioning part of our education system.

In completing this review and making recommendations, the committee held that funding core education is a provincial responsibility and that this should be reflected in school council fund-raising. That is, fund-raising should only be for those areas which fall

outside of core funding, such as school band trips. Funding for textbooks and other core material should only be paid out of core provincial funding, and it is allocated to school boards.

4:10

Madam Speaker, the province has accounted for changes to the curriculum, changes which Motion 515 addresses, in a number of ways. First, our government has been sensitive to the adjustments that are required every time the education curriculum is changed. For this reason we have staggered the implementation of new programs and, indeed, lessened the number of changes that have taken place throughout this decade. In fact, most core courses have been around for about 10 years.

Second, Madam Speaker, Alberta Education has provided and paid for in-service training for teachers for the new math program. In fact, Alberta is the only province to provide special funding for this training in the amount of \$2.2 million.

Third, education funding will be increased quite significantly over the next three years to the tune of about \$600 million, Madam Speaker.

Motion 515 fails to recognize the important steps that I've just mentioned which were taken to address curriculum changes. Right now education spending accounts for 28 percent of total provincial spending, second only to health care. By the 2001 fiscal year total education spending will have risen another 19 percent to \$3.74 billion.

As I mentioned a few moments ago, the majority of education funding is given to school boards in block grants. Madam Speaker, in other words, our government does not dictate precisely how these dollars are to be spent. Instead, school-based decision-making, flexibility, and expanded roles for parents and communities are the guiding principles, and that's the way it should be. Alberta's method of funding allocation is of benefit both to school boards and the students they serve. The benefit comes from the ability to allocate resources based on local needs and priorities, which school boards are far better equipped to assess than the central government agency in Edmonton.

Along with these benefits school boards have also accepted the increased responsibility that comes with funding. This responsibility entails wise budgeting and planning for the future. Every school board has had notice and, accordingly, has been able to plan for any costs associated with implementing the new math 20 program. The money is there, the direction is in the hands of the local school boards, and both support and notice of the change have been given by Alberta Learning. It would seem to me that the ultimate goal behind Motion 515 – that is, ensuring a smooth transition to the new curriculum – has already been achieved.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I'd like to restate my opposition to Motion 515 and urge my colleagues to vote against it. While the sponsor of this motion has commendable intentions, this motion is neither necessary nor in keeping with the spirit of the local autonomy and decision-making which guides Alberta's education system.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd just like to make a few comments in support of this motion. The motion is urging the government to provide schools with additional funds to cover the costs of switching to new curriculum mandated by the province.

We've heard from a couple of backbenchers today, the Member for Redwater and the Member for Calgary-Egmont. I heard the

Member for Redwater talk about being somewhat annoyed at this particular motion, and I want to just bring forward a comment, as I get started, a comment in a book called, *A Government Reinvented: A Study of Alberta's Deficit Elimination Program*. The comment was made by a senior ministry official, who said that he worried that "cutting grants to boards without controls would result in certain boards simply 'offloading onto taxpayers' by increasing local taxes."

Well, I have to start by saying that if that's not calling the kettle black, I don't know what is, quite frankly. This government went on a rampage and decided to decentralize education. They decided that it was necessary to cut funds. They didn't know from where, when, or how to do it; they just did it. Quite frankly, as a result of that, we hear other people get blamed by this government for the inadequate funding. We hear that the teachers, the unions, the parents, the student governance, elected officials, everybody but this government is responsible for the cutbacks in education, except the people that went forward without a plan and that now have a horrendous, embarrassing surplus, and I do say "embarrassing" because it's bad management that created that. [interjections] Well, I'll tell you that it's not the government climate.

The Member for Calgary-North Hill can sit in his arrogance and laugh all he wants. But guess what? The people in this province need money in education and health care, and this government sits on its butt day by day, choosing not to put the money where it's needed. [interjection] Yeah, it goes to Mexico. It goes to Cambridge. It goes to London. But it doesn't go to the education system in this province. Thank you. [interjections] Madam Speaker, I'd like to move forward. Obviously these guys are a little upset and sensitive. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

My comments in relation to the curriculum changes I think are very significant. I have an inner-city riding. I have about seven junior high schools. There are no senior high schools; they feed off to other areas. We have youth in those particular schools that come from homes where it's a struggle just to put food on the table. It's a struggle to clothe kids, and it's a struggle to pay the bills every month. Many of my constituents don't have the extra funding, Madam Speaker, for the \$120 calculator that's required in grade 10 or 11, required by the department of education in order to do the problem-solving in the new math curriculum.

I hear constantly from parents not just in my constituency but in other constituencies about the worry their children have going from grade 9 to 10 into applied math and pure math. In fact, we have kids who were very good at math and whose math skills were quite excellent who are now requiring tutors, whose parents now have to pay for tutors because their kids aren't making it – these are bright kids – who now have to share a calculator in the classroom because they don't have \$120 to spend on a calculator.

So the education system changes, and I'm not quite sure why. To satisfy this government's drive towards technology? To satisfy this government's need to create an environment in this province that's not going to be suitable for all kids graduating from high school? Not all kids are going to be in an information technology field. Not all kids are going to be doctors, and not all kids are going to be lawyers. You know, we're going to have some kids out there that are going to need some other skills, Madam Speaker, and we need to stick with the basics. It doesn't seem that this government is doing that.

We have created a need for commercial involvement in the schools. We have Coke machines in the hallways of many schools,

and along with the Coke machine we have an attached commitment to the school. Maybe the school will get \$50,000 for having the Coke machine over five or six years or something like that. What school is going to turn that down when they're already underfunded? What school is going to turn it down when they have a deficit?

4:20

In fact, we talk about downloading and deficits. Let's talk about the schools in this province with deficits. Let's talk about how those schools function. Well, what do they give up? It's a tough call, Madam Speaker. What do they give up? They give up having enough textbooks so that every student can take a textbook home to do homework. Yeah, that's what they do give up. Do they give up computers? Well, I don't know. This province has mandated that all schools will have computers, but they haven't paid for the infrastructure to go into those schools to ensure that they're running.

So parents are busy and are working and fund-raising, not just for school trips to Europe, in some cases, not just for school trips to the museum and things like that. Parents are fund-raising for the basics, and it's time it stopped. It's time this government decided that we're going to decide what elements we want, what components are going to make a good education system, and from there they can decide, then, to fund it. It's not the other way around, that we just keep throwing money at it.

Then we have the hon. Member for Redwater telling us about the \$600 million that has gone into education just recently. That was after the minister of education last spring told us there was no need for money in education, that there was adequate funding and we're not going to do that. Now what happens is that they get onetime funding, not sustainable – no planning here – for little projects. Then we have the Minister of Learning, as we found out today, who is going to decide how the money is spent, because the minister has the final say. Well, I have a little difficulty with that. That's taking a little of the autonomy away, Mr. Minister, from the school boards, and we're going to give the minister from Mexico here the ultimate say. I don't like the way he spends money. You know, I don't like where his priorities are, so I have difficulty with that.

Madam Speaker, I guess I'm somewhat perplexed because we have ministers spending money on their own education. We don't have enough money in the public school system for our kids, and that's a problem for me. You know, in one of my schools we have a private funder. That particular funder has given a tremendous amount of money to the school, and that's why in that school there is full-time kindergarten. Without that private funder there would not be full-time kindergarten in the school, and I'm talking about an inner-city school where kids need to have a little bit of a head start. So I'm a little concerned that the priorities of the government are the absolute bottom line, and that doesn't resonate well when it comes to the cost of education.

I think this is a very good motion put forward. I think the government needs to heed some of the issues that have been brought forward as a result of this. Let's not forget, Madam Speaker, that we have had over 10,000 names on petitions throughout this province, through every constituency in this province, asking for more funding. And not just for more funding. You know what? When I hear people say, "Status quo isn't good enough," they're right. We need a plan. We have to decide what the education system is going to look like, and the government hasn't done that. The government hasn't sat down and said: "You know what? This is where we're going to go. This is how we're going to do it." They haven't laid that out so that Albertans understand what it is. They can't do that, you see, because they don't think that next year they're going to have any money to give back to the schools, so they'll just have to get what's in the budget, and that's it.

Again, we have some long-term problems created as a result of

underfunding. You know, there's always going to be an issue, given the lack of funds for infrastructure, the lack of funds for capital and certainly for curriculum needs. Madam Speaker, this government created a huge deficit, and it's within the education system itself. It's not going to be resolved by throwing cash at it. It's going to be resolved by having a good plan, by ensuring that every kid has equal opportunity in school, not by using some achievement scores and showing increased improvement in those scores for schools to get extra money. You know what? In some of my schools it's a huge achievement to see attendance increase. It's a huge achievement to see a kid come to school five days in a row. It's a huge achievement to reduce the transient attendance levels. We have one school that has a population of 275 kids, but in one year they had 600 kids come and go from that school.

I'm out of time, Madam Speaker, and I could go on forever. You know that. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate, hon. member, to interrupt, but under Standing Order 8(4) I must put all questions to conclude debate on the motion under consideration.

On the motion as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, all those in favour of the motion, please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's defeated.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	MacBeth	Soetaert
Gibbons	Olsen	White
Leibovici	Sloan	

Against the motion:

Boutilier	Hierath	Pham
Broda	Johnson	Renner
Burgener	Jonson	Severtson
Cao	Klapstein	Shariff
Cardinal	Kryczka	Smith
Day	Laing	Stelmach
Doerksen	Lougheed	Stevens
Dunford	Lund	Strang
Forsyth	Marz	Tarchuk
Friedel	McFarland	Taylor
Fritz	Melchin	Trynchy
Haley	Nelson	West
Hancock	Oberg	Yankowsky
Herard	Paszowski	

Totals:	For – 8	Against – 41
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[Motion Other than Government Motion 515 lost]

head: Government Motions

4:40

Adjournment of Session

23. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when the Assembly adjourns to recess the fall sitting of the Third Session of the 24th Legislature, it shall stand adjourned until a time and date as determined by the Speaker after consultation with the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

[Debate adjourned November 23: Mr. MacDonald speaking]

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I stand to speak today to this motion, I'm as surprised today as I was last Tuesday, November 23, when the motion was moved. Just think: the fourth day of this fall session, now the eighth day. Is it because Christmas is around the corner, or is it that this place is boring? I'm not like my colleague from Calgary-Buffalo in his passion to be in this Chamber.

Just think. If this Assembly would have been called into session in mid-September or mid-October, maybe Albertans would have been served much better, not only for the government to have time to get their bills passed, if they really wanted them passed, but maybe for the appropriate questions that Albertans would like the Official Opposition to ask the Executive Council, which we were so privy to find out today.

We like to think that the Executive Council doesn't want to be asked questions. I believe that the question shouldn't be held in my back pocket until the next session. Madam Speaker, I'd like to mention to you that before the last shuffle happened, I was able to take a few questions to the minister. I want to put it this way: I won some, I lost some, but maybe Albertans were served better by my returning a phone call and that I was able to call somebody.

Now, back to calling this session sooner. I'd like to mention something. Maybe if they would have called it in September, there would have been 20 municipalities in the constituencies of the members across the floor that I wouldn't have traveled to in September, October, and November.

Getting back to why closure was called. Christmas is coming. Has everybody hung their stockings for Christmas? Well, we hadn't sat since May 18, Madam Speaker, and now we started sitting again November 17. When do we serve Albertans by debating the government bills, the private members' bills, the motions other than government motions on the Order Paper? Do Albertans, who have just acknowledged how important Bill 40 is, have the proper lobbying time? Do they have time to be able to get to their MLAs, because their MLAs are in Edmonton? Guess what? They want to go back home fairly soon. It could be that the government doesn't think that the views of Albertans are very important toward Bill 40. [interjection] If we force it through, Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, they might have a chance to argue with you.

In other ways I can see that this discourages legislators from raising the kind of details and researching just toward private members' bills. I suppose it must be the same Executive Council who won't answer questions when they are in the Assembly who don't want to be forced into the Assembly. That would be non-democratic; wouldn't it? For the last few years under the present Premier Albertans have seen a long time between sessions and a long time before going back into session. Are we in or are we not in? That is the normal question that comes to us from Albertans. Albertans have so many concerns created by the off-loading, downloading of

this government over the past six years; you know, the hidden deficit.

With the lack of planning and this government budgeting on the fly, it's not whether the program has received, as promised, the surplus money over the past three months; it's whether it should get the money out of surplus. Madam Speaker, where's the plan? What I'm getting at is that the extra provincial spending should not come out of the unbudgeted money of the surplus. There are so many inadequacies in the system: health, education, infrastructure, seniors, social services, housing, the homeless, student debt, unaffordable postsecondary education, pupil/teacher ratio – or maybe it should be the teacher/pupil ratio. The number of students per class is another major thing, and we have a motion by one of our members on this.

We have witnessed the lack of information, and probably it's because of the lack of consultation around the educational tax review that was set up in March of this past year. Albertans have got a 5 percent and a 10 percent cap, but the taxes are still going up. I guess Albertans get the no answer when no consultation occurs.

The announcement of the cap at the AUMA convention was a nonissue instead of being the warm fuzzy that it was intended to be. For Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, the Bow corridor communities, I want to mention that I don't want to make light of the 30 to 50 percent increase there would have been next year, but the committee may look at this as a very large province and at whether the market evaluation is working as well as everyone thought who was sold on it in this Assembly in 1994.

We should have been in this Assembly three to five months ago asking questions around agriculture, the agriculture woes. In the Peace River region and continuing down through the north and northeast parts of this province: a \$100,000 loan to the inevitable fact that many farmers are going down. Combining all the regions together to come up with this loan doesn't work. We have a very large province. Maybe this works down in the Brooks area, but it isn't necessarily working in the northern part of this province. My heart goes out to the farmers of northern Alberta. Maybe we should have some grants on how deep we can dig dugouts so they've maybe got water so they can keep the cow/calf operation working and so on. We can see now what was happening to the livestock in the feedlot systems down in this area. What's been happening is that all the cattle started to be moved down into this area in July and August. The price was there, but so was the selling of cows.

I thought this session would last for a while and we'd be able to flush out some concerns from the Infrastructure minister on secondary highway programs, on a fuel tax that maybe would benefit the whole province instead of the two large communities, on annexation in the capital region – oh, I mean amalgamation. Maybe the chair, Lou Hyndman, will start becoming a chair and start letting the people of the 23 municipalities know what the government's agenda actually is.

Well, I'll save a few minutes to speak in Committee of the Whole to this motion and to Motion 24. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Just for clarification, hon. member, this motion does not go to Committee of the Whole.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Just because it doesn't go to Committee of the Whole, I'm going to have to take all my time to speak.

Many of my colleagues have spoken, Madam Speaker, about a number of issues, and the adjournment motion seems to be somewhat premature. Now, I know that we're closing in on Christmas. I'm aware of that.

MR. HANCOCK: You probably have your shopping done already.

MS OLSEN: No. As a matter of fact, Mr. Minister, I don't. I'm being a Grinch this year; I'm not giving presents.

However, Madam Speaker, we could avoid this pinch and this crunch close to Christmas by having a set time for fall and spring sessions. What I'm alluding to is the government saying: "Look; let's call it in November. We'll get close to Christmas, and the Liberals will want to get out of there as fast as we do." Therefore, the closer Christmas comes, the more anxious people are going to get, including us. Well, you're wrong. I get paid to come in here, and I get paid to be in my constituency office. My constituents like to be represented from either place. It doesn't matter to them. Right now private health care is an issue and health information is an issue, and they want me in here talking about it. Very clearly.

I know that the Premier's office is getting as many calls about his private plan, his plan to privatize health care, as we are in our constituencies. I know that, and I also know that they're not in favour of his scheme. So he's got a problem.

MR. MAGNUS: How do you know that?

MS OLSEN: Well, I'll tell you why. I'll tell you why, hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill. It's not just my office receiving the calls. I'm receiving calls from around the province. I'm receiving calls from rural areas. I'm receiving calls from Calgary. I'm receiving calls from people who have called the Premier's office and have been treated rudely by the Premier's office in relation to this issue, who have felt they haven't been able to get their message across. You know what? Those people want me and my colleagues in here debating this issue, asking the questions, because our job is to hold these guys accountable. [interjections]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Order please.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Through the chair, please, hon. member.

4:50

MS OLSEN: I'm looking directly at you. I have no need to look over there.

So in terms of the adjournment motion, I think it could be resolved by maybe starting the session the first week in October, ensuring that we're able to go two months, eight or nine weeks, ensuring that the fall session deals with the important issues that are on the table right now, that we're productive and that we're not sitting here and rushing to get out. I know we aren't, but I know that some other folks might want to be, and I understand that. I understand that, Madam Speaker, because a lot of these folks have a long way to travel. I understand that and I'm aware of that.

They could help the issue maybe by the backbenchers putting pressure on their cabinet and saying: look; we want to be out December 1 or we want to be out December 3; after the lights are switched on at the Legislature, we need to be at home attending to the issues in our constituencies and with our families. That could be done by having session start at the beginning of October, not the second week in November, and we could achieve a lot more.

I think that given that, I certainly can't of course support the adjournment motion. I look at what's on the table, Madam Speaker, and I look at what we are debating. I think the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry is right, that we do debate in here, and that's our job. We're not told when to stand up and debate. It's not determined who is going to speak to what. You know, we get to speak to whatever we wish, and we have that luxury. That is a

luxury. In fact, I was impressed to see three hon. members get up last night and debate the merits, as they see them, in Bill 40. I was impressed. Of course, three of the strongest people I see in the Conservative caucus are the three people that got up and spoke, so I applaud those people.

We have had the quarterly update come out, and we'll talk about that later tonight. One of the things that concerns me, Madam Speaker, is that we know that the economic conditions in this province are pretty nice. We as a province have been sitting pretty comfortably, and we acknowledge that. But let's not be so cocky as to think that any government created that climate. Okay? This government that's in power today and this cabinet that's leading the charge are very fortunate. They're fortunate that oil and gas revenues are soaring again. They're very fortunate that there's some diversification in manufacturing. You know, there are all sorts of reasons why they just happen to be very lucky that they're sitting here when the economy is strong. Let's not pretend, however, that any one of those members is responsible for that, because that's not true. The people who are involved in the oil and gas industry are the people that are responsible for those commodity prices. The people who invested in the province and opened up and diversified the manufacturing market here are responsible for that.

But we've forgotten one group of people, Madam Speaker. I'm worried about small businesses. They're just keeping their heads above water, and it doesn't seem to matter which end of town they're in. It doesn't matter whether they're in Eau Claire Market or whether they're on 124th Street or Whyte Avenue or 17th Avenue in Calgary or Main Street in Fort Macleod. It seems to me that small businesses are struggling, and while we address the issues in terms of taxes, we still don't see any of that benefit going to the small business owner. So I think that the government needs to see what's going on out there, and we need to learn what it is that the small businesses need, those kinds of things.

Let's talk a little bit about downloading too. We know that the government decided that they had to make all these drastic cuts to get our financial picture in order or at least for us to get out of debt. I'm going to say that. The government made massive cuts, brutal cuts, whatever you want; it doesn't matter. They took those steps, and now we are apparently out of debt. What's happened as a result of that plan – and that was a purposeful plan – to cut back so hard? They would rationalize the deficits with the health authorities and with the school boards and the deficits that are cropping up in municipalities, whether that's financial or whether that's infrastructure, capital deficits, whatever it is. Madam Speaker, it's important to note that this government has created that deficit, and it's not just a financial deficit. It's a global picture.

So now with the government sitting with their \$1.4 billion or \$2.9 billion, however they want to throw out those numbers, that's very nice for this province. But you know what? We need to get control of health care. We need to get control of education. We need to help the municipalities out, Madam Speaker. There's a private member's bill on the table talking about arming county cops and special constables. Well, I have a better solution for that. How about a reinvestment in policing in this province? Let's arm the people who are qualified to enforce the law in this province and not expect somebody who is inadequately trained to respond to a call. I have a real problem with that. I don't care where it is in this province. If somebody is attending a call which potentially could cause harm to them and they're inadequately trained, this government is going to have to be held responsible if somebody dies as a result of that. I am very, very concerned about that because there is a tremendous amount of underfunding in provincial policing.

We've put forward a very credible motion in that respect, Madam

Speaker. I want to see the bylaw guys deal with the bylaw issues. I want to see the policemen deal with the issues that are potentially life threatening or are actual police work. Let's not de-skill policing like we have done with nursing and everything else. Let's not continue down that path. As much as I admire the work of the county cops and the special constables, they have a role, but that role has to stop at some point. I am not prepared to start arming people who are not bona fide, qualified, well-trained police officers. It takes years of experience to gain the knowledge in those kinds of things and actually how to function as a police officer. It's not good enough just to give somebody a firearm and say: go to it, boys; we'll give you six weeks of training. It doesn't work that way.

There's a tremendous cost to that training as well. So let's talk in this Legislature about having those people who are most qualified to carry those firearms out on the street. Those are policemen, and they do a damn good job in this province. They do an excellent job in this province. I don't want to see their jobs de-skilled, and I don't want to see somebody get hurt as a result of responding to a call that they shouldn't be at in the first place.

Those are concerns I have. I want to talk about those issues here. I don't want to adjourn the Legislature and just move on to the next session and have all our pomp and ceremony and not complete anything here.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I know that your intentions are good, but I really would like you to focus on the motion at hand.

MS OLSEN: I am. I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. I don't mean to wander so much, but there are so many issues out there that adjourning the Legislature would just be, to me, a bad move at this time. In fact, I would suggest that adjourning the Legislature at this time would not look very good for this government, given the issues on the table.

Let's talk about Bill 7. Bill 7 is in third reading.

MR. HANCOCK: We'd like to talk about Bill 7.

MS OLSEN: Did you talk about Bill 7? I'm not sure, Madam Speaker, if the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General actually spoke to Bill 7. I'd like to hear him do that, you see, so the longer we stay in here, the more my hon. friend can stand up and talk about Bill 7. The same with Bill 40.

5:00

You know, I respect his opinion; I really do. I would like to hear from him, and I don't mean that in a condescending way like I've heard in this Legislature today. I respect his opinion, very much so, and I would like to hear more debate from some of those folks in here that have something to add to the debate. I would like to know what their arguments are. Maybe they're acceptable arguments, maybe they're not, but it would be great to hear them.

So there's another reason right there, Madam Speaker, to stay here, so we can hear those people who are leading the charge. This whole front bench here, they're leaders. They're supposed to be leaders, and they don't get up and speak to anything. I shake my head, and I say: "Well, wait a minute here. These are the leaders. They should be responding to Albertans."

MR. BONNER: Do they make more money?

MS OLSEN: I don't know. You know, they get paid, I think, an extra \$44,000 than the rest of us backbenchers and opposition people

here. I think Albertans need to get that extra \$44,000 worth out of them. I think they do. I think that instead of watching the odd one nod off here every now and then, Madam Speaker, they should get up and speak in debate. I think that's important. I don't think we should diminish any of the functions that we have as legislators. I think the Legislature is equally as important as being out with our constituents and as taking on the responsibilities that we've all been assigned in our specific caucuses, be it standing policy chairs or Health and Wellness. Whether it's in those areas or whether it's in our caucus – you know, we're assigned to some of those committees, which we all take very seriously – there isn't any role that should be diminished at all.

Madam Speaker, I hear members opposite often talking about why we should be in this Legislature. Well, this is part of the democratic process. This is part of why we were elected. We were elected to come down here. We were elected to battle the issues. You know, we may differ in ideology, but that doesn't matter. We are all doing a job for our constituents who sent us down here, so I think it's very important that we fulfill that.

I would like a commitment from the government's side, from the benches here, the Conservative caucus there, the Reform caucus here. If they could get together in the United Alternative, Madam Speaker, and they could maybe come up with some dates so that every year we'd know we were coming back in here, we wouldn't be standing here debating this motion. We wouldn't be standing here at all. We would be saying: All right; we know we're in the House, and here's our Christmas break, and here's our winter break.

There's a point of order.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Referring to Party Affiliation

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Under 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. member is alluding to members of this House as being representatives of the Reform Party, and while some of them may well be members of the Reform Party, in this House we are all Progressive Conservatives and proud of it. The Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta has elected members to this House for some 30 years and longer, and they've served proudly as Progressive Conservatives in this House. The allegation, the suggestion, that we're serving in other capacities is quite inappropriate.

Now, members are members of both the Reform Party – some members are members of the Progressive Conservative Party federally. Some may even be members of the Liberal Party federally; I don't know. [interjections] But it is quite inappropriate for the hon. member to suggest that members of this House as representatives in the provincial House are members of other than the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, which has proudly represented this province for many, many years.

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

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, on the point of order. How many question periods have we sat here and listened to the Premier talk about the members in the Liberal opposition and our federal cousins? He used a whole series of other phrases. How many times have we tried to say that we're elected as Alberta legislators, that we're members of the Alberta Liberal caucus, and that we're proud of that? It's exactly the same kind of confusion.

It seems to me, Madam Speaker, that the difficulty to be able to

understand the difference of political affiliation at the very worst is an affliction that affects both sides of the House. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Standing Order 23(h), (i), (j). First off, I want to say that the chair has allowed a fair amount of latitude in the debate that has taken place here. I think that we are wandering, hon. member. If in fact you are talking about the motion as I read the motion, as I see the motion, then stick to the motion.

I also believe I heard talk about the Reform Party. I don't know what the Reform Party has to do with this particular motion. So I would ask you and subsequent speakers to please stick to the motion.

Debate Continued

MS OLSEN: Madam Speaker, I don't know how much time I have left. I'm sorry if I offended anybody with their affiliations to their political parties. I didn't mean to offend anybody. I'm sorry. I was just thinking that it would be nice if everybody could get together and come up with a time that we could actually say: yeah, we're in the House in October, and we're out of the House in the first week in December. That's all I was alluding to. I like that sort of, you know, united event that happens there. I think they can both work towards the same thing.

We are talking about the adjournment motion, Madam Speaker. I mean, that's the issue here. I don't know how many times I'm going to have say "adjournment" in my speaking, but let me know if I'm off track.

We talked about the terrific economy, but we also talked about the small business people, and we need to discuss that in here. We also talked about the issue of Bill 7 and Bill 40, the Health Information Act. I want to talk about privatization of health care. I also mentioned, you know, that we can't diminish any role we have, be it here in the Legislature, out in our constituency office, or with our assigned duties as an MLA. When I'm speaking to this, I'm speaking in relation to the adjournment motion, and I'm not sure that I'm that off base here.

We talked about downloading. Those are all issues, Madam Speaker, that need to be discussed in this House. Those are all issues that we should have the time to discuss. This is part of democracy in this province. I feel very, very privileged to be in here. I feel that the electorate put me here, and they asked me to do a job, so I feel quite offended that the adjournment motion comes so quickly and comes in response to Christmas. It comes in response to the need to get out and celebrate the festive season for some people.

Quite frankly, you know, all the civil servants, Madam Speaker, are going to work up till the 22nd, 23rd, 24th. I have no problem working here in this House to the same time lines as the civil servants work, because I don't see myself as any different than those people. Those folks are helping run the government. They're helping this government put forward policy initiatives and those kinds of things. I'm not any different than them. I don't put myself above them. I don't think the government should pay for my education in some far-off place.

So, Madam Speaker, I believe with all my heart that this adjournment motion is a little premature, and the real issues that need to be tackled have not been addressed adequately, that the government has definitely lost its way, and it's like, you know, Mary's little lamb. The government is off somewhere else, and we're just trying to help guide the government back.

5:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not going to speak for long because I feel that this debate that we're having here today is a colossal waste of time, and I don't intend to waste any more time than necessary. What I would like to do, though, is bring the House back to the issue that is being debated and remind us what this is, because we have been hearing from the opposition about the fact this is an adjournment motion. Well, this is a motion that is required when the House adjourns. There's nothing in this motion that requires this House to adjourn today, and to hear the rhetoric coming from the members to my left here, one would assume that as soon as this motion is finished, we all pack up and go home.

Well, Madam Speaker, that's simply not the case. That's simply not the case. The fact of the matter is there is important business to be done in this House. All of us have been elected to come to this place to conduct that important business, and when that important business has been concluded, then this motion would come into effect. The effect would be that the House would then remain adjourned until we resume with the spring session. So let's not let the rhetoric get carried away over here, and let's all realize that this motion is simply a very simple motion that is dealt with when the time comes, when it's appropriate, and when the business of the House has been concluded. So don't let anyone think that passing this motion is going to allow all of us to go home, because frankly we have a lot of work to do. I have a lot of legislation that I fully intend to speak to later on in this session.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd preface my remarks with it's wonderful to engage in debate in this House. We actually have some debate on a matter that really and truly, in the words of the member that just spoke before me, doesn't matter a bit. Well, the facts are that that's why we're here to debate things. It's a matter of choice as to what you debate. The government gets to decide that. The facts are that dome disease can be cured rather easily if a lot of the subjects of the day get to be debated.

I'm thinking of the oil and gas policy, the thing that drives 25 percent of the revenues of this province. We never speak of it. We get one report from an institute, and we don't get to speak of it. Whether I believe it or not doesn't come to the fore at all.

We don't get to fundamentally speak about a move by this government in health care. We don't get to speak of that. We get the Premier who stands up and answers: and the Liberals do this. And that's it. That's the debate. He looks right at the camera and says: this is the debate. That's not a debate. Those are just bad statements.

What about education funding? The biggest debate in the province just went on in Calgary, not here but in Calgary. They made a choice. [interjection] While I'm standing here talking about fundamental funding for education, I get a question from one of the government members saying: "Well, why do we have to debate it here? It was already done in Calgary." I'm sorry, folks. Some members here have really lost it to figure out what this place is about.

Earlier we had the Member for Redwater say at the start of his speech that education funding and the operation of the education system is a joint responsibility. We have a member over here who says that it isn't. Well, there should be a debate. But do we hear that? No. Not even close. Nothing. I mean, it's embarrassing to sit in this Legislature and hear the silence opposite. Now, I heard earlier from the Member for Medicine Hat that he fully intends to engage in debate on some of these matters before us later on in the

session. Well, I applaud that, because that doesn't happen very often.

Earlier in the week we had the Member for Calgary-North West enter into debate, last week we had the Attorney General and Government House Leader entering the debate, and it was good to hear what they had to say. I didn't always agree with it; some of it I did agree with. But you won't hear that unless you do have this debate.

There are many of us that speak of many things outside the Legislature, some quietly inside the Legislature. I'm blessed with having a seat next door to some of the members of the government, and there are often little debates that go on. Those debates should be spoken of here on record to understand what this is about. But do you think that happens? Nah. Do we talk about some areas that I happen to have spent a little bit of time on and have had one of the members opposite that is here now, the former Minister of Environment – we had some great discussions about fire suppression. I learned quite a bit, and he showed me where there was information to learn. I don't always agree, but that's not the point. The point is that I would have liked to have had a debate about the level of funding of fire suppression in this province. I'd like to have a debate about the economic return that we get on a cubic metre of pulp.

Yes, there's lots to be said for maintenance of jobs, but in fact in a lot of instances we are giving that away. We put infrastructure around it, and we're giving it away. Now, maybe that is the right thing to do, because it certainly does maintain jobs, and if it's sustainable, then maybe it is a reasonable decision. But we don't hear that debate, not even close. We don't have any of that. And why not? Because it seems to be that this government has had its way for so, so long that it does not fundamentally understand democracy. It has lost it entirely.

There was one member in this House that at one time sat on opposition benches, albeit that member sat in the Speaker's chair last session. To this day he will tell you the difference, and with the opportunity to sit on both sides of the House, one really does learn how it works. It doesn't all happen just in caucus, because there's never enough time in caucus to really fully debate any issue. All members of a caucus understand that.

There are lots of members in this House that take on individual causes and really champion those causes. The Legislature doesn't hear that debate fully and openly as it should. We sometimes hear it down the hall, but it doesn't happen here.

Now, I'm not afraid of being wrong. I've been wrong before. I came from a level of government where, yes, sometimes I was proven right way down the road, but what difference does that make? The importance was that I had an opportunity to influence those decent people trying to do a decent job the best they knew how without the heavy influence of a party whip. Sorry, Madam. No offence intended to that particular whip.

It doesn't need to have all of this heavy hanging. As an aside, I had the opportunity that being the chair of the Public Accounts Committee has afforded me three times now to be able to speak to members from Australia in the same position that I happen to find myself in. They have a totally completely different way of operating under exactly the same set of principles involved in a parliamentary system that comes from the Westminster model. They have something that this government would dearly love to have. They have a tradition of having a government member as the chair for the Public Accounts Committee. Now, that puts a little different spin on things.

5:20

What they do is they separate. There is a marked line between Executive Council and members. In the debate there the party

affiliation and the political stripe become less important than one's personal conviction as to how they see the world operating and in what philosophical manner they see it operating. So when it comes to question period, the questions are not namby-pamby, bat-out-of-the-park questions; they are tough questions. The questions all across the floor are tough. In recent history in I think it would be Adelaide, which would be in South Australia, a member of Executive Council was actually forced to resign because a backbencher on the same side of the House questioned the ethics of that minister and found something to be in error.

Now, that would be unprecedented. That couldn't happen here. They have, I suppose, what may be a much more Wild West approach to politics, a Wild West approach to democracy there than we have here. I'm not saying that's right or that's wrong, but it is a different way of doing it, and it does allow debate. They do get down to some very, very big issues there and, strangely enough, in Western Australia some of the same ones that we have here.

They have a very, very large forest that is being depleted rapidly, and they have great grazing and ranch lands that are very, very, very dry and often dependent on genetically altering the old way of doing it. Not manipulating genes like we do it now but in the way that canolas were developed and wheat germs were created. They rely heavily on these things.

So they have really, really good debates in their House and in committees. They have all-party committees. Yes, of course, the governing party, the one that won the most seats, does in fact have the upper hand in committees, and so it should be, as it happens in Ottawa. But when you do get that opportunity – yes, it's impinged by that, that government always must win, but when you're doing it, when you're people to people in a small committee, it happens that minds do get changed. It happens that there's some information brought, and by spirit of debate there is better lawmaking. It does occur.

Why would we want to have to go through this charade, do this question-and-answer and this put-up job where you get to sleep and play computer games or mind-bender games in this House? You should be actively participating. We should have the best of all debates. There are few opportunities in this world to do that. We here have that. We have an opportunity. We have the funds available. We have the time available. We have good minds around, in effect, to reinvent this democracy of ours, but it's not going to happen. The member says, "Let's go home. Let's go home." And a big cheer.

I worked very hard to be able to come here and debate, but I had a little different idea of it. I thought I was actually going to be allowed to debate some things. I thought I was going to have the opportunity to change some minds. The only way I ever get to change any minds around here is in my own caucus. Well, that's not all that helpful. [interjection] The member opposite thinks it's really quite funny, but you go out and explain this same situation to high school kids, and they're laughing at you. They're laughing at you. They're saying: what kind of outfit is that? It's not because of the heckling. No. It's because of the inactivity of this Legislature. This Legislature is so constipated that it wouldn't know a proper debate if you fell into it headfirst. It's just unbelievable. I mean, how many have a good debate?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I think maybe you should return to the topic at hand.

MR. WHITE: Madam Speaker, the topic is closing off debate. That's what it is. The only two weapons that this side has to use are truth and time. You don't listen to the truth, and now you want to cut off the time. I don't understand. Am I missing something in this democracy? Quite obviously, I am. We don't get to speak on some fundamental issues, which that chair knows well.

Municipal funding: it's hurting out there. Do we hear it? No, not a bit. We don't get to talk about that. I notice my good friend over there who would love to speak of social policy. I know he's got a lot to say about that. He understands it all. He understands it fully and completely.

We have a number of farmers opposite. I would love to learn something of farming and farm policy from them. I could sit and listen to it at great length, and debate this and all of the supports. I can be convinced that we as a Legislature should be supporting farmers because of the consequences if we don't. But did you hear argument from this side when \$100 million a year was given away? No. We didn't even hear debate about it. It came on a Thursday morning, and it was gone by Thursday night because a couple of other things managed to get on the agenda.

It's unbelievable that intelligent people can sit opposite and accept the kind of nondemocracy that we have here. This motion just says it again. Call a fall session and jam it up against Christmas so that you take out one of the opposition's tools, that of time. You do away with it. You jam it, and in a week and a half or so – there is not a whole lot of debate that will be heard in public anyway, because people are busy buying presents, all those things, working up to Hanukkah and Christmas.

Those people opposite say: "Who cares? Why did you ever show up here? Why did you ever put your hat in the ring if you don't care?" It's unbelievable that these members can continue to sit here and do the nonargument.

AN HON. MEMBER: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

MR. WHITE: Oh, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. That's the one that keeps yakking.

Now, to get on with what's important, we had a member from Medicine Hat, a decent chap from everything I know. We've had a number of discussions about a number of things, and he wants to talk about the important issues and then go home. That's all we're asking. Just bring those things here. Just once in a while you may find that there are some ideas that can be used in open forum. It may not come from these benches, but if you do get some good debate occurring, there'll be lots of people in the galleries, I can tell you. If you had a good, full, open debate on health care, they would be full. If you had a good, full debate on oil and gas, half of Calgary would be up here to find out what was actually going on. If you had a debate on education funding . . .

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, under Standing Order 4(1), the Assembly stands adjourned until 8 this evening.

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