

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, December 6, 1999** 1:30 p.m.

Date: 99/12/06

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, good afternoon. Would you please remain standing after the prayer.

Let us pray. On this day let each of us pray in our own way for the innocent victims of violence. Amen.

Life is precious. When it is lost, all of us are impacted. Today we join with Legislatures across Canada and honour the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. This day of remembrance marks the 10th anniversary of the 1989 massacre of 14 women students at l'ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. Hon. members, please join with me in observing one minute of silence.

Thank you. Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the consul general of the Republic of Korea based in Vancouver, Mr. Kang. He is accompanied today by the consul, Mr. Park. I want to welcome Mr. Kang to Alberta on his first official visit to our province since his appointment.

In addition to being Alberta's fourth largest trading partner, Korea, of course, occupies a very special place in Alberta's international relations. Kangwon was Alberta's inaugural sister province back in 1974. This year, of course, marks the 25th anniversary of our special relationship. Alberta/Korea relations were elevated recently with the appointment of Mr. Jack Perraton of Calgary as the honorary consul of the Republic of Korea.

I would ask our honoured guests to rise in your gallery and receive the very traditional and warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of 217 Albertans, primarily from Edmonton and Calgary, urging

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.

Thank you.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table a petition from some 111 Calgarians, which brings the amount to 1,253 Calgarians, that urges

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.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition sent by the SOS group, and they are asking

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

That's 122 more people who have signed.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg permission to present a petition signed by 109 Edmonton and district citizens 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.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I presented the other day with respect to underfunding of public education might 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.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented last week on the Workers' Compensation Board now be read and received.

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 Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request that the petition I presented on Thursday on the freezing of tuition fees and institutional fees be read and received now.

THE CLERK:

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

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 40 submission.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 I will be asking for the unanimous consent of the Legislative

Assembly to debate the skyrocketing numbers of homeless persons throughout the province. I have the requisite number of copies for distribution.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 46
Miscellaneous Statutes
Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2)

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 1999 (No. 2).

[Motion carried; Bill 46 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE CLERK: The following documents are tabled pursuant to Standing Order 37(1) required under the Legislative Assembly Act and the Government Accountability Act: Executive Council 1998-99 annual report; Advanced Education and Career Development 1998-99 annual report, sections 1 and 2; Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development 1998-99 annual report; Agriculture Financial Services Corporation 1998-99 annual report; Community Development 1998-99 annual report; Economic Development and Tourism 1998-99 annual report; Alberta Education 1998-99 annual report, parts 1 and 2; Alberta Ministry of Energy 1998-99 annual report; Ministry of Environmental Protection 1998-99 annual report; Alberta Family and Social Services 1998-99 annual report; Alberta Ministry of Health 1998-99 annual report, sections 1 and 2; Inter-governmental and Aboriginal Affairs 1998-99 annual report; Alberta Justice 1998-99 annual report; Alberta Labour 1998-99 annual report; Alberta Municipal Affairs 1998-99 annual report; Public Works, Supply and Services 1998-99 annual report; Science, Research and Information Technology 1998-99 annual report; Science, Research and Information Technology 1998-99 revised annual report; Alberta Transportation and Utilities 1998-99 annual report; and Alberta Treasury 1998-99 annual report.

1:40

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, that was the first time in this Legislative Assembly that we've exercised the provisions under Standing Order 37(1).

Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to table the Government of Alberta annual report for the fiscal year '98-99, and that's in accordance with section 10 of the Government Accountability Act. This contains all of the consolidated financial statements highlighting the fact that for the fifth year in a row the government produced a balanced budget and reduced the provincial debt.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly today copies of three news releases issued at the close of the recent World Trade Organization ministerial meetings in Seattle. These releases are the Alberta government release, the government of Canada release, and the Cairns group release, and they all express their deep disappointment over the unsuccessful conclusion and the need for suspension of those talks.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got two tablings for today. The first one is the statement issued by the Alberta Teachers' Association today condemning the call for closure on Bill 40, and it calls on the Premier to annul this attempt to seek closure.

The second one, Mr. Speaker, is the report of the count of homeless persons in Edmonton undertaken on November 17, 1999, which indicates a 30 percent increase of the homeless in Edmonton over last year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I have four tablings: one by Rick Robinson, who wants the Premier to know that along with his friend Shane Andrus he opposes private, for-profit hospitals.

On the subject of Bill 40 I've got one from James Keylock of Innisfail objecting to Bill 40, another from John McIntosh, and finally from the Psychologists' Association of Alberta.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of tablings: firstly, a letter from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce opposed to Bill 40, the Health Information Act; secondly, a letter from the Health Sciences Association opposed to Bill 40; thirdly, the Canadian Medical Association model health information act; fourthly, an editorial from *The Medical Post* on patient confidentiality; fifthly, the Canadian Medical Association presentation on Bill C-6 to the Senate of Canada; and finally, copies of more than 50 Liberal amendments to fix problems with Bill 40.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of a report from an Alberta injured worker. It starts with a letter from the board of directors that they cannot recommend changes to the Workers' Compensation Act for the purpose of affecting a decision of the Appeals Commission and has many pages of evidence why there should be changes to the Workers' Compensation Act.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table the Manitoba 1999 Child Poverty Report Card, An Agenda for Action and, secondly, a citation of what poverty means to a child that is incorporated in this report.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a tabling today from a constituent of Edmonton-Manning saying to the Premier that there's insufficient help with home care for their family.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly an excellent citizen and tremendous volunteer in the community of Viking, a gentleman who has served three terms as

mayor and also two terms as councillor. I'd ask Mr. Bill Taylor, who is seated in the members' gallery, to rise and for us to receive him with a very warm, traditional welcome.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. John Masters. John is the president and CEO of the Calgary Research and Development Authority, and since taking on this new position in February of 1998, John has been a tireless promoter in the encouragement of growth in the high-tech, knowledge-based sector of this province. He certainly keeps me well informed as to what is happening in the Calgary area, promoting the Calgary area and the importance of the Calgary area to knowledge-based businesses. I'd ask John to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 47 energetic students from Fraser elementary school up in northeast Edmonton. With them are two teachers, Mr. Hiob and Mr. Hennig, and six parents: Mrs. Chekowski, Ms Diol, Mrs. Bundun, Mrs. Tomlinson, Mr. Marshall, and Mr. Romaniuk. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd like to ask that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

MR. THURBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly some 60-odd young, bright, and polite kids from the Calmar school. They're accompanied today by two teachers, Mrs. Jeanette Wilson and Mrs. Andrea Cameron, and eight parents and helpers. I don't think they needed any of the parents or helpers because these kids are very polite and well mannered. I'd ask at this time that they rise in the gallery and receive the warm welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 30 students from H.A. Kostash school out of Smoky Lake. They're not present in the House at the moment but will be here during question period, and I did want to recognize them. They are being accompanied by their teacher, Dominique Cere, and parents Mrs. Barbara Shapka, Mrs. Penny Cherniwchan, Mrs. Karen Stark, Mrs. Bonnie Kordyban, Mrs. Bobbie Manak, and Mrs. Barb Zenko. I would ask that we give them a warm traditional welcome.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Centre I would like to introduce to and through you Alannah Borlind, an Edmonton-Centre constituent newly elected to the Downtown Edmonton Community Association board. This is a new community group for people living in the downtown. If she would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. This Premier seems determined to implement two-tiered health care in Alberta despite overwhelming evidence that it results in higher costs and longer waiting lists. In a paper to be presented at the finance ministers' meeting in Ottawa this week, provincial finance ministers point out that "Canada's publicly funded health care system provides a competitive advantage to firms in this country". According to a Conference Board of Canada study cited in the finance ministers' report the advantage of medicare lies in the cost of employer-sponsored health plans, which represent just over 2 percent of payroll costs in Canada compared to 9 percent of payroll costs in the United States. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the Premier promoting two-tier health care in Alberta when it will cost businesses more to purchase supplemental health benefit plans for their employees?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have said time and time and time again in this Legislative Assembly that we are not promoting in any way, shape, or form a so-called American style two-tiered health care system. As a matter of fact we never allude to the American system. The only people who allude to the American system are the Liberals across the way. What we're proposing, through a policy statement that has been issued, is a program that adheres without question to the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. So what we're talking about is the delivery of services within the publicly funded system as we know it today.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, there are many examples of regional health authorities now contracting out to private clinics. I've named two. Cataract surgeries: that's one. Abortions: that's another one. Various diagnostic services: there's another one. So it's happening right now. All we want to do is take some of the pressure off the system by expanding it somewhat, and many editorials, many reports, have said that the steps we're proposing are actually timid, tepid, and modest.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, where is the Premier's proof that his scheme to contract out won't result in higher payroll costs for businesses for the purchase of enhanced employer benefit packages for their employees?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't see how it could result in that because everything we're proposing is under the publicly funded health care system, and as I pointed out before, this is already being done. We'll take the Calgary health authority, for example. The CRHA currently provides health care services through contracts with community partners in the amount of approximately \$250 million per year. As a matter of fact, those rules that govern those contracts will be strengthened in the legislation, because the contracts will have to be open, and they will have to prove beyond doubt that there is going to be a cost benefit.

It's happening right now, as we speak. I've asked the opposition before: if it's not happening – what about abortion clinics? Will they stand up now, today, and say that abortion services should not be contracted? Will you stand up and say it? [interjections] Never mind all the shouting and yelling. No, you won't. You won't.

So here are the rules that govern those contracts as I speak today: services or procedures offered through contract to community and private partners do not provide preferential access for any patient. It's when you provide preferential access to patients with dollars to pay that you create the two-tiered system. That is not what we're proposing, Mr. Speaker, and they know that. All procedures and services are covered by the CRHA. Patients are not required to pay any out-of-pocket expenses. I don't see how that's going to add to anything. Standards of care . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Speech.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, it is a speech, Mr. Speaker. It is a speech because they don't seem to understand, and they won't listen. So I keep having to repeat the messages over and over and over again, and I'll continue to do so.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why doesn't the Premier just admit that his scheme to establish two-tier medicine could make it too costly for small businesses to enhance the health coverage for their employees leading to inferior employee benefits?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, this is the kind of fear mongering, misinformation that does the Liberal Party a disservice and the people of this province a disservice. The only one who is on record as alluding to a two-tier system is the leader of the Liberal opposition, and I refer to a press release that she put out. She said, "Ban private, for-profit hospitals from receiving taxpayer dollars." So by simple deduction, what this member is saying is that she would condone private, for-profit hospitals.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, it'll be nice when the Premier understands his own policy.

Regional Health Authority Contracts

MRS. MacBETH: I'm glad the Premier has raised this whole issue of the contracts, because clearly the elements of his scheme to entrench two-tier health care is to hide those contracts from taxpayers' scrutiny between the RHAs and private hospitals and clinics. The taxpayers of Alberta are being asked to subsidize private contracts with private hospitals. We believe that Albertans deserve to see those contracts, not some sanitized version as referred to in the Premier's policy statement. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier commit to releasing the full details of the existing contracts in the short-stay clinics between RHAs and private clinic operators?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I've pointed out before – and the questions are becoming quite monotonous – those contracts and all business dealings between an RHA and a contracted procedure or a contracted service are subject to the rules of FOIP. We have said that if they allow this legislation to go through, all contracts, as a matter of law, as a matter of legislation, will be open and transparent. But they do not want that, because they don't want to see the legislation go through.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier backtracking on the promise that he made on the radio this past Saturday when he said: we will make the contracts public? Was he referring to the existing contracts, which are not public, or the new contracts, which anyone has yet to see?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, right now the RHAs operate under the rules of FOIP. There are rules relative to contracting, and that's that all contracts or surgical services are tendered and evaluated right now by the CRHA on the basis of quality, cost, and the experience of the provider. The business dealings are subject to the laws of FOIP as are the business dealings of this government. I was alluding to the legislation and the policy relative to the legislation, which quite simply says that all contracts will be open and transparent, and we've given that undertaking to the federal minister.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why should Albertans believe this Premier when he says that he will produce contracts when he has refused to produce the ones that already exist?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I answered that question. There is no legislated authority at this particular time other than the freedom of information . . . [interjections] Mr. Speaker, will you kindly tell him to shut up. [interjections] No. Really. I'll let him have the floor.

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

Confidentiality of Health Records

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Canadian Medical Association has adopted a very tough privacy code and did so in 1998. It's one that has received very favourable comment from all parts of Canada, yet this government wants legislation that affords less protection of private health information than the Canadian Medical Association standard. My questions are to the minister of health. Will he indicate which elements of the Canadian Medical Association privacy code the provincial government does not accept?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, if I might comment on the opening remarks of the hon. leader, I agree that the privacy code has received a favourable comment from all of the doctors' organizations across Canada. But the system is, I think, mainly focused on and should be focused on patients. They should have protection of their private identifiable health information, and that is what our legislation is focusing on. There should be a principle involved in the legislation where the least possible information will be released for the purpose for which it is needed, and that's included in our particular legislation.

2:00

In terms of the overall answer, the general answer to the hon. leader's question, Mr. Speaker, we are focusing on the needs of the overall health care system, yes, the needs of physicians and other providers within the system, but where our focus is, I think, which may be somewhat different from the focus of the Canadian Medical Association, is on the needs of the individual, first of all, and the needs of the system to serve the individuals who are being treated in the system of Alberta.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will this minister table a detailed response as to why this government refuses to accept the CMA privacy standard, which protects information between physician and patient in Canada?

MR. JONSON: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think the premise on which the question is based is inaccurate. Our particular legislation, which is before the Assembly, has gone to a great deal of detail in protecting and providing a reasonable balance between the rights of the individual, the rights of the physician, and the ability of the

system to perform the best way possible on behalf of Albertans. I think that is the direction that we should go. We will not have legislation in this province that is going to serve Albertans well which is focused on the point of view of any one particular part of the system.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the minister stand by our Alberta physicians when they choose to adhere to the higher standard of the Canadian Medical Association?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we feel that, first of all, our overall approach to health information and its protection and proper use is at a very, very high standard, and as I've said, I think the code of the Canadian Medical Association certainly is at a, quote, high standard as it applies to the doctors' control of information, but once again, although doctors are an extremely important professional component of our health care system – one might certainly agree that they are probably the most important in terms of their in-depth knowledge – they are not all of the health care system. The patients are part of the health care system, the general public is part of the health care system through their overall interest in it, and that is what we're providing the right balance for in this legislation.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, hospital services funding between 1975 and 1998 fell by 33 percent. In the meantime other health care spending, primarily in the area of home care, which is mainly delivered by for-profit agencies, little more than doubled, and at the same time prescription drug costs between 1975 and 1998 increased by over 60 percent. Knowing this, I'd like to ask the Premier why it is that he continues to promote private, for-profit hospitals dipping into taxpayers' pockets instead of doing something to control the explosive costs of prescription drugs in our health care system.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if a full commitment, an absolute commitment, an unwavering commitment to the principles of the Canada Health Act is leading to a two-tier system, then what this hon. member is talking about and what I'm talking about are two different things obviously, because we are talking about absolute compliance to the principles of the Canada Health Act: universality, public administration, comprehensiveness, accessibility, and portability. Nothing wrong with that. That is not wicked, and that is not sinful, and that is something that the majority of Canadians would support. That is the fundamental framework for the legislation that we are proposing.

Relative to drug costs, I think that if you ask any doctor or any person involved in the pharmaceutical industry, one of the causes that has led to rising drug costs is that these drugs are exotic. They're sophisticated drugs, they prolong life, they ease suffering, Mr. Speaker, and the simple fact is that they are very, very expensive.

MS BARRETT: Well, Mr. Speaker, instead of driving up health costs by promoting legalized private, for-profit hospitals that will be dipping into the taxpayer's pocket, why doesn't this government save some money by expanding public, not for-profit delivery of home care services, a move that would be supported by 81 percent of Canadians?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has alluded to one of the problems that is deemed to be contributing to the high cost of

health care, and that's the aging population. I would venture to comment that most, not all – of the people who require home care are people in the seniors category. Certainly, this is part of our program to deliver health care services more efficiently and more effectively.

As to what we're doing relative to home care and the delivery of home care services, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to remind members of the Assembly, perhaps particularly the leader of the third party, that we have, I think, been making a major effort in terms of planning for the care of our aging population, although they are not the only group of people who need home care in terms of supports in this province. It is quite in keeping with the trends and directions of health care in this province and across this nation that we would be committing additional resources percentage-wise each year to meeting this very, very important need.

The second point that I think has to be emphasized, Mr. Speaker, is that we have had for years in this province a mix of volunteer, private, and mainly public providers of home care and long-term care. There is nothing changing in that particular area of our health care system except that, yes, we are committing more resources to it, and we're committing it along the philosophy and the direction provided in the long-term care report.

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, the evidence is so clear, conclusively shows that for sectors like home care and prescription drugs private, for-profit delivery costs more. Why, then, won't the Premier just drop his cockamamy idea of promoting for-profit hospitals putting their hands in the taxpayers' pockets?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I have no idea how what the hon. member alludes to as private, for-profit hospitals, which, you know, is something that we aren't promoting at all, relates to the delivery of home care services. The hon. minister pointed out that there's a combination of delivery systems, some by the private sector, some by nonprofit organizations, some in conjunction with hospitals or RHAs. So, Mr. Speaker, there's a combination right now.

The things that are driving up costs generally are the afflictions that are associated with a rapidly aging population and, as the member points out, the high cost of drugs that are somewhat more sophisticated and more exotic now than they were 10 or 15 years ago, but those drugs go a long way to alleviating suffering and prolonging life.

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

Family Violence

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone in this Legislative Assembly knows that violence against anyone person is an offence under the Criminal Code of Canada. Therefore, any form of violence within a family must be addressed as criminal violence. Unfortunately, there are still a number of high-profile cases in Edmonton that continue to keep family violence in the spotlight. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. What has the Justice department done recently that will help reduce these types of criminal acts of violence?

2:10

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's a very important question and, I think, an important question today, 10 years after the unfortunate event in Montreal, which was so appropriately commemorated by the House earlier. In 1998 almost 5,500 incidents of

spousal abuse were reported to police, and charges were laid in 70 percent of those cases.

As a government we've worked hard to give police more tools for dealing with family violence. Alberta Justice, for example, worked with the then department of family and social services to bring forward the Protection against Family Violence Act, which was proclaimed into force last June. The legislation gives police power to protect family members from violence by removing abusers from the home, by preventing abusers from contacting victims, by allowing police to search homes for family members at risk so that they can leave if they want to.

Last week during question period I'd remind you, Mr. Speaker, that I also outlined work being done in Calgary as a pilot project to set up a new domestic violence intake court. This dedicated court will include judges, prosecutors, and probation officers devoted to dealing with cases of family violence. That court will be up and running in the new year.

These are just two examples of many that are being brought forward by the government to assist in dealing with this critical issue.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary to the same minister: will the Justice minister explain to all Albertans just how well the new Protection against Family Violence Act is working, and are there enough police to fulfill the mandate according to the act?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's difficult at this point to give a full and complete answer to that because it had only been proclaimed in force as of June 1. We are monitoring that. The early reports from police are that they are finding the act useful. We've heard that victims are finding it easier to get help. We're continuing to monitor the act and determine its effectiveness. We're working closely with Children's Services, under whose purview the family violence act is. Early indications are that it's proving to be a very effective tool, and we'll have a more full and complete monitoring of that over time and a full and complete report next fall.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplementary is to the same minister. What, in fact, is Alberta Justice doing to reduce family violence in aboriginal communities?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, again, that's a very important issue and a complex one. The Protection against Family Violence Act doesn't apply on reserves. So we're working with Children's Services and the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs to help First Nations that wish to proceed in that direction develop bylaws they can use to make sure the tools that are available under that act will be available on reserve.

We're also working in a number of areas; for example, with the new Tsuu T'ina tribal court as a part of our provincial court, which will bring the first comprehensive aboriginal justice system in the country. We're looking forward to how the peacemaker's role, for example, in that court works to help reduce family violence and provide a role for the community in showing that family violence is not condoned within the community and help to eradicate it.

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

WTO Negotiations in Seattle

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for

the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, who is responsible for trade policy. I understand that the Seattle World Trade Organization's ministerial conference was suspended without an agreement on the next round of trade negotiations. Can you give details on why the talks were suspended?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, an important question of interest to Albertans considering that about 34 percent of our GDP depends on trade. At the last round of world trade talks, the Uruguay round, it was determined that agricultural services would be the main areas mandated to be topics for this round. Therefore, in the ministerial conference in Seattle we were expected to come to an agreement on the final agenda for the next round of talks. Unfortunately, we were unable to do this because of disagreement in three primary areas: first was the elimination of export subsidies, second was addressing the concerns of developing countries, and, thirdly, the elimination of antidumping trade actions.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is a very complex area. There were 135 member countries trying to reach agreement, and it became very clear that the European Union was not going to consider and refused to consider the elimination of export subsidies. The U.S. certainly was very reluctant to talk about antidumping. The member countries of the developing or the least developed countries were very concerned because they don't see that what had moved forward in other trade talks had been implemented in their countries, and they wanted to make sure that there was an implementation plan before they participated.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: My second question is also to the minister responsible for trade policy. What were Alberta's priorities in this round of World Trade Organization negotiations?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's position on trade and investment are certainly long standing, very much in concert with Canada's position, not entirely in all areas, but there's certainly agreement on one of our primary objectives which was the complete elimination of all agricultural export subsidies, a substantial reduction of domestic subsidies that end up being trade distorting. We definitely wanted improvement in market access. We wanted larger tariff reductions. We wanted larger access levels.

One of the very important areas for us, Mr. Speaker, was agreements in the sanitary and phytosanitary measures that can restrict trade artificially. Our objective was to ensure that those are only used if there are sound, scientific bases for them so that they cannot be used as an artificial barrier. We wanted, of course, to change the unwarranted use of countervailing and dumping laws.

Our overall objective, though, Mr. Speaker, and an important objective of this is to make all of the rules clearer, to impose some discipline in obeying those rules. We are trading in a world environment, and it's better for everyone, wherever you are in this world, if the rules are clear, if the disciplines are tight.

Those were our objectives going into these talks.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: My second supplementary question is also to the minister responsible for trade policy. What happens next? Will there be another meeting in another location to resume the talks?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the director general has been, of course, charged with having discussions with the member countries to talk about the resumption of these talks. They were suspended; they were not ended. My understanding is that the director general will write a report on the talks. I want to make it clear to everyone that the work that was agreed upon is not lost. It is frozen, put in the

bank, you might say, and will become a part of the next discussions.

When the director general is satisfied that he's had the necessary consultations to have, one, a process and, two, a place to hold these talks and a commitment from the member countries that they want to proceed with these talks in a positive way, we expect that they will resume. It is our position and certainly the government of Canada's position that the sooner these talks resume, the better for all of us.

I must add finally, Mr. Speaker, that our negotiators, Minister Pettigrew and Minister Vancilief, did an extraordinary job of putting forward Canada's position, reinforcing it, and including us in the complete discussions of those talks.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Peace River.

Health Services Availability

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine, Corinne Kushneryk, is physically disabled with rheumatoid arthritis and has used a wheelchair for 25 years. She has always worked but needs the services of a full-time, live-in personal care attendant, which she employs through the self-managed care program of Alberta Health. She has recently sold her house in Edmonton as she's planning to move to Devon to be closer to her family and friends. Two weeks ago she wrote to the Premier and minister of health and still has received no reply. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain why Ms Kushneryk has been informed by the WestView regional health authority that she will not be able to access the self-managed care program as there are no dollars left in that region's program?

2:20

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, with respect to the particular case, I will certainly make sure that the reply is coming more promptly if that's the issue of the questions.

The second thing is that there is some difference across regions in terms of the extent to which they develop certain programs. In some smaller communities there is not the economy of scale or the number of people to have that particular, in this case, self-managed care in place. That might very well be the reason that WestView has not established this type of program within Devon.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I would undertake to review the situation, but I would like to also point out that we do have – and the questioner certainly acknowledges – self-managed care in this province, something that is not common to all provinces in this country. It is an indication of the fact that we are providing a wide range of services in this province.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why can't the dollars for Ms Kushneryk be transferred from the Capital health authority to the WestView region to allow her to move closer to family and friends and keep her livelihood? Transfer the dollars.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, generally speaking that is the case with respect to provincewide services with respect to what we refer to as our import/export health care services. The hon. member is quite correct in that we do not have money following the patient in the area of home care and, as was mentioned here, self-managed care.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, I undertake to look into the situation, but as I've said, the lady was receiving care and chose to move to Devon. We will have to see what can be done there.

MS LEIBOVICI: Is the minister willing to tell Ms Kushneryk that she's unable to move outside of the Edmonton region because the

dollars for self-managed care are not transferrable? Are you going to tell her that she can't move within this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have certainly – and I'll repeat myself – committed to look at the specifics of this particular case. I think I should also indicate so there is no misunderstanding that there are differences across the province in terms of the ability to provide certain types of surgery, certain specialized programs, and those are only viable in certain parts of the province.

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

Canada Pension Plan Reform

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These questions are directed towards the Provincial Treasurer. For a number of days now there have been a lot of media reports about Alberta's position and possible policy change relative to the Canada pension plan. This coverage has included editorial comments on both ends of the spectrum relating to benefits and possible disadvantages to Albertans should we decide to opt out of CPP and establish an Alberta plan. To the Provincial Treasurer: I know this could be lengthy, but perhaps you could give us a short version of the main problems from an Alberta perspective of the existing Canada pension plan.

MR. DAY: I dare not make it lengthy. The Speaker might have an observation on that.

There are some significant challenges that we've identified. The unfunded liability is something that would be significant. Now, we're responsible for that to a degree right now; it's just where it appears on the books. There's no question that that is one of the concerns. We've got the investment guidelines that we feel should be upgraded so that the people doing the investing are allowed to move along industry standards, including increasing the foreign investment levels to 30 percent. That should be something they should be allowed to do.

The whole aspect of how it's reported. The fund itself is broken into different areas. There's the whole area of disability management, then, of course, retirement benefits and survivor benefits. Those should be broken out of their component parts so they can be more accurately reported and more accurately administered.

MR. FRIEDEL: Again, to the Provincial Treasurer, Mr. Speaker, and with perhaps just a few specifics. How complex a procedure would it be for Alberta to disentangle itself from the Canada pension plan?

MR. DAY: Well, we've said that to this point now we have been able with the considerable research that has gone on to identify that there would be some economic advantage to doing this. The technical difficulties and challenges to that are not small: just calculating, as I said earlier, the unfunded liability, add to that calculating Alberta's share of assets so that there is an appropriate transfer there, and then setting up our own administrative capabilities. We do have the capability within the province, but there would be some significant work to be done on that. The aspect of portability: workers who have been residing in Alberta for a while and then move to other provinces are going to face some portability issues, so there'd have to be formulas put in place there. There are technical challenges to doing this, Mr. Speaker.

MR. FRIEDEL: I know this is a complicated issue, but would we have assurance that anyone who is now entitled to or anyone who is

about to in the future be entitled to Canada pension plan benefits would be as well off or better off in an Alberta plan?

MR. DAY: Well, Mr. Speaker, again to clarify, we are not by any means giving notice that we are doing this. We are exploring it and exploring it with more intensity than we were even a year ago, and that would be an absolutely integral part of moving further in this direction. People who are presently vested, people who are presently receiving benefits from the plan would have to know absolutely that their present vestments would be guaranteed and that if there's any benefit change, it would be a benefit to the better, that they would not be put at risk. So that's very clearly a part of any approach: absolute comfort going to those who are presently vested and those who are receiving benefits.

And there would be benefits, Mr. Speaker. We're concerned about this intergenerational transfer of wealth, where the younger workers would be paying proportionately more and at the end of their paying time, when they're 65, they might be receiving less. That's a concern that we have. If the federal government would agree to some things being put into the plan which would lower the administration costs, increase investment rates, yield more back to the plan, you could then have the possibility, we suggest, of a portion of a person's contribution being put into individual savings accounts. That's a possibility that we'd like to see pursued.

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

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's electricity deregulation plan is on the verge of a major short circuit. Deregulation supposedly is to help Albertans lower their energy bills, but in fact the bottom line of the socialist B.C. government's power company is going to be enhanced. It seems to be the only thing that's clear. My questions are to the minister responsible for Resource Development. How does this minister back up his claim that electricity prices will go down under deregulation when a report prepared by the electricity consumers in this province called the Consortium, large industrial users, clearly shows a \$2.5 billion increase in costs to Albertans?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, actually, consumer rates have gone down since 1995-96 in the province of Alberta. We base the whole premise of deregulation on a competitive marketplace. The KPMG report that the hon. member refers to is a speculation put forth by some of the industrial consumers that is not based on fact, on what the PPAs will perform like during the auction process.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, if the minister says that the PPAs have performed, could he tell this House and the province how that's occurred? It certainly hasn't occurred thus far.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the power purchase agreements are before the EUB, the regulator in the province right now. We're awaiting the result of that hearing. I don't want to make any speculation on the value of those power purchase agreements, which are the value accessed to the hundred and some plants existing in the province owned by shareholder companies. Discussions such as this could send a signal to the marketplace, which shouldn't be done here on the floor of the Assembly.

MR. WHITE: Oh, Mr. Speaker, dip and dive.

Can the minister tell this House what will occur should the balancing pool be in the negative? What happens? Who supports the loss there, sir?

2:30

DR. WEST: My best calculations, going forward without the results of the EUB hearings, is that there will not be a negative balance in the balancing pool.

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

Yellowstone to Yukon Corridor

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there's an initiative under way called Yellowstone to the Yukon, or Y to Y, that has to do with protecting wildlife corridors. I'm interested in the effect that this initiative may have on my constituents of West Yellowhead. My question today is to the Minister of Environment. What is the Y to Y initiative, and who are the people involved?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Yellowstone to Yukon initiative, or Y to Y initiative, has the objective of establishing a protected wildlife corridor that will extend from Yellowstone national park in the state of Montana through to the Yukon territory, which will be about 3,000 kilometres of wildlife corridor.

Mr. Speaker, there are many people who have been involved in putting together this project. It includes conservationists, ecologists, social scientists but also First Nations peoples, recreationists, landowners, and community leaders.

Mr. Speaker, the government supports the Y to Y principle. My department is specifically looking at the details very closely before determining how Alberta's existing wildlife corridors will become a part of the Y to Y initiative.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplementary question is to the same minister. What is your department doing to ensure that Alberta's wildlife corridors are protected?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, this government has already protected 30,000 hectares of land in the Bow Valley corridor, which would be a very important part of the Y to Y plan. We will be developing a management plan for this corridor in the new year. Certainly stakeholders and the public will have an opportunity to participate.

Mr. Speaker, the eastern slopes grizzly bear project is a solid example of how we are working with stakeholders to ensure a healthy animal population in our protected areas. Information from studies like that grizzly bear project will allow us to determine how better to manage the animal populations in those areas.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the province has recently adopted a no new development policy for Kananaskis Country, following a great deal of public consultation. That prohibition on new industrial and recreational development in K Country area will also further help protect wildlife in the area.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary question is to the same minister. What is the department doing to achieve a balance in Alberta protected areas?

MR. MAR: Well, it is true that our protected areas are certainly important habitats for our wildlife populations, but they also serve as important places for our human population to enjoy nature, and I'm agreed with the hon. member when he suggested there needs to be a balance between those two values.

One way that we do that is to provide guidelines with respect to recreation, preservation, tourism, and appreciation of the natural environment so that we can work together in harmony for our protected areas. As an example, Mr. Speaker, my department uses a science-based framework so that Alberta special places can achieve the right balance of protection for the province's six natural regions and 20 subregions. Finally, we will seek public input into the management plans for every protected area, and we will redevelop our protected areas legislation based on feedback from the public on the Natural Heritage Act consultation. My observation has been that when we go to the public, the public does have a very strong sense of the balancing needs of protection and use of our natural areas in the province.

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

Prince Rupert Grain Terminal

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Treasurer confirm that Alberta taxpayers will not receive \$16.4 million in principal and interest payments due this year on the \$93 million loan to Prince Rupert grain terminal?

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, his numbers aren't quite accurate. The loan itself was established in 1985-86. Actually, the facility was built for a cost of \$289 million, and the Alberta government provided 80 percent of that amount. Of the 80 percent, of the \$231 million, \$106 million came from the heritage fund and \$125 million from general revenue. Of that \$106 million from the heritage fund, there was a commitment that interest would be paid at 11 percent and also that there would be a minimum payment of \$4.25 million each year on the principal. For the last nine years Prince Rupert actually paid the full interest amount, and they also paid in six of those nine years the full principal amount of \$4.25 million. The way the deal was written then, 1985 – we wouldn't get into this type of deal today – was if the throughput of grain fell below a certain level, then they wouldn't have to make the full payment.

The member is right on the one point. The full payment will not be coming in this year according to the agreement. We think it'll be just over \$3 million that will come in rather than just over \$15.4 million. We have been advised of that, and that's part of the original deal.

MR. SAPERS: Will the Treasurer confirm, then, that the further recovery at some future date of this \$16.4 million in deferred payments is uncertain at best and has been added to the \$42.9 million provision for loss against the loan principal and interest on the terminal?

MR. DAY: The member is quite right. We also are concerned with the final collection of all that. When a full payment is not made, it is not written off. That portion is written down for that year, but it is added to the final principal and final amount that's owing. So we share that same concern. It does have to be paid at the end of the agreement.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Treasurer, given the low wheat and barley prices, what assurances can the Treasurer provide Alberta taxpayers that they will receive a full \$20 million principal and interest payment due in the year 2000?

MR. DAY: I'd like to be able to give that assurance, Mr. Speaker,

but in fact to make that full payment, there needs to be a level of something in the order of 4.5 million tonnes that come through, and there is no way that I can stand here or that anybody could guarantee that that'll happen. We don't know what prices are going to be next year. So I can't give that assurance to taxpayers. As I said at the start, this deal was done back in '85 and wouldn't be done today. If the prices are down and if the flow of grain is down, then, in fact, next year there will not be a full payment, but what is owing will be tacked onto the end of the agreement.

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

Aboriginal Policy Framework

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the MLA for Calgary-West and as an Albertan I am very proud of our aboriginal roots and history. I know that many of my constituents share this pride and also applaud government initiatives that involve working co-operatively with aboriginal communities. My main question is to the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Why has the government of Alberta released a governmentwide proposed aboriginal policy framework?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, it's been a long-time request by aboriginal leaders in the province of Alberta. Secondly, we have maintained what we call a positive relationship with aboriginal people in this province, and we've dealt with issues on a case-by-case basis for many, many years. Thirdly, we now need to develop something more comprehensive and something that will work within the departments we have that work with various aboriginal groups.

Mr. Speaker, it is a draft for discussion only, and I think it's very important to be able to know that we are now doing consultations with various groups in the province of Alberta.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my first supplementary is also to the Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. How have aboriginal communities and other Albertans who are interested been involved in this process?

MS CALAHASEN: Mr. Speaker, I'm really pleased today to be able to identify the process we've gone through. First of all, on September 14 we called the aboriginal leaders, the chiefs of all the nations in this province, to come to our meeting so that I could personally hand deliver this for a number of reasons: first of all, with respect for the leaders of the First Nations that are in this province and, secondly, to ensure that we work on a government-to-government relationship.

2:40

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, on September 15 I met with Metis settlements leaders as well as the Metis Nation to ensure that they got the information prior to anybody getting this information. So I really feel that we've worked with the First Nations. But we also have other stakeholders. We've got industry. We've got oil and gas. We've got the forest industry. We've got the mining industry. We need to make sure that whatever happens, we consult with them also, because I think that when we're dealing with an aboriginal policy framework, we're also dealing with those individuals who have to work with First Nations as well as Metis people.

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, my second supplementary is to the same minister. How will this policy framework actually benefit grassroots aboriginal Albertans?

MS CALAHASEN: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, this document, this draft, is for discussion only. It deals with a number of things. First of all, it has goals. We have three goals, we've got principles attached, and we've also got commitments to action. In fact, the first goal identifies that "the government of Alberta will work with aboriginal people to improve individual and community well-being and self-reliance," which is very important when we're talking about aboriginal communities.

Secondly,

the government of Alberta will manage natural resources and revenues for the benefit of all Albertans, in a way that takes the existing treaty and other constitutional rights of aboriginal people into account.

Mr. Speaker, we must be able to work in partnership and co-operation to be able to work out solutions rather than dealing with problems on an ad hoc basis.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, it talks about "the government of Alberta will clarify its own roles and responsibilities with respect to aboriginal people."

These are items that the aboriginal community as well as industry have been asking for, and we need to be able to find a solution to something that's going to work for all people.

Thank you.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now we'll call on the first of seven hon. members who will be participating in Recognitions today.

Thank you all for your co-operation during question period today. We arrived at 12 sets of questions, which is the largest number we've had so far this session.

The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Alberta Honey Producers Co-operative Limited

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A few weeks ago I attended the annual banquet and dance of the Alberta Honey Producers Co-op Limited. They were celebrating a productive year as well as planning for the next. The Alberta Honey Producers Co-op exports to 30 different countries, and in fact the co-op is responsible for 30 percent of total Canadian honey exports.

The co-op started in 1940. The benefits of forming a co-op quickly became evident when producers joined together and were able to import bees and supplies. When sugar was rationed during the war, you can imagine that profits were excellent. Presently, in addition to marketing beeswax, they lead industry with their development and research and have many lines of flavour blends of honey and natural ingredients like cinnamon, lemon, barbecue sauce, and honey mustard. The honey processing plant is located in Spruce Grove. Spruce Grove has been dubbed the honey processing capital of Canada and welcomed the plant with the slogan: honey, I'm home.

Since 1985 Roy Sterling has been the general manager for the honey producers, and under his guidance and forward-looking board members the co-op thrives. Every continued success to the Alberta Honey Producers Co-operative Limited.

National Farm Family Award

MR. FISCHER: It's with pride and pleasure that I rise today to recognize the farm family who recently won the Canadian outstanding young farmers award. This prestigious award honours young farm families that exemplify excellence in their profession.

Their operation consists of two purebred cattle herds, Gelbvieh

and Red Angus, and a commercial herd. They export embryos, semen, and live cattle to places as far as Australia and China, as well as exporting timothy hay to Japan. Scott and Lisa have successfully shown cattle throughout North America for the past 10 years, accumulating numerous awards. Most notably, in '96 they were named Alberta purebred breeders of the year. For the past two years they have bred and owned all of the champion Gelbvieh cattle at the Canadian Western Agribition.

In '99 they were the first Canadian breeders to have bred and owned grand and reserved champion bulls at the Denver national livestock show. For this they were named premier breeder of the show.

Congratulations, Scott and Lisa Severtson, whose proud father is here in the Legislature today. Thank you for your great contributions.

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

Colonel Belcher Hospital

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to recognize 135 men and women who live in the Colonel Belcher hospital in the city of Calgary, a long-term care facility, and their long-suffering families in Calgary. There had been a great deal of excitement on November 8, when the Calgary regional health authority indicated that there would be a news conference with respect to the relocated Colonel Belcher facility.

You can only imagine the acute disappointment those people felt to find, when they showed up and waited patiently, that all we heard was recycled announcements that had already been made before and were well known to these people: that the facility was going to be built on the old motor vehicles' site in the constituency of Calgary-Bow, that it would be attached to some other facilities. But the point is that no one yet has indicated when construction will start. So you have a great number of people who have been waiting many years for some certainty. The question is: when are those people going to be able to move into a new facility?

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Shane Fage

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Shane Fage is a constituent of Calgary-Fish Creek who I am extremely proud of. He has recently been accepted into the sixth international young composers' meeting in Holland. It is a great honour, because the conference operates in tandem with International Gaudeamus Music Week. As part of the conference there will also be a composition competition, and all successful entrants are expected to submit an example of their work. The winner of the competition will receive a commission for a large-scale orchestral piece with a premiere performance. The meeting is limited to 15 participants worldwide, and Shane will be representing Calgary, Alberta, and Canada.

Secondly, Shane has received a commission for a large-scale orchestra piece from the Biblioservice van Gelderland on his orchestra work *Westerbork Memorial*. Camp Westerbork was a Nazi Dutch internment camp that was liberated by both the Dutch underground, General Allard, and the Canadian military on April 12, 1945. The work is dedicated to the Dutch people and the Canadian military who fought for Holland's freedom, some of whom were from towns and cities here in Alberta.

I ask the Assembly to join me in congratulating Shane and wishing him good luck.

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

Provincial Football Championship

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to recognize and congratulate the Jasper Place senior football team, the Rebels, who this year won the provincial football championship on November 20, 1999. The game was a close and an exciting one, as evidenced by the final score, 39 to 37. They dethroned the reigning champions, the Raymond Comets, who have won this championship three years in a row. For 12 years no northern Alberta team has won this coveted championship.

This year was a memorable one for the JP Rebels. They had a 12-0 season, defeated Ross Shep in the city championship 30 to 20, and defeated Bev Facey for the northern Alberta championship, 42 to 6. Duane Gladden, number 20, was voted the most valuable player of the Edmonton public league, and coach Elwin Worobec was voted the coach of the year.

We are all very proud of their season. The players showed character, desire, determination, and heart throughout, and they represented us all very well.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Okotoks Community Lottery Fund Projects

MR. TANNAS: Thank you. Today, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to give recognition to the community of Okotoks, who said thank you to the Minister of Gaming for the community lottery grant program. Okotoks Mayor Bill McAlpine and Okotoks client services co-ordinator Marg Cox recently presented the minister with a book which contained coloured prints and descriptions of the 58 separate projects, which ranged in cost from \$750 to \$28,000. The projects included improvements to tot lot parks, playgrounds, Rotary and Lions club parks, family parks, skateboard/BMX facilities, swimming pool, ice arena, victims services office, community recycling centre, running track, community garden, soccer fields, and the cultural station.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Okotoks is a vibrant and exciting community of 11,000 people which is growing rapidly. So recreation facilities are in demand and well used, and the community lottery funds are very much appreciated.

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

2:50 United Victims Assistance Foundation

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize the United Victims Assistance Foundation. The foundation was established by Sig Jorstad and exists to provide, at no cost, professional personal protection services for victims of violence who have been harassed, abused, stalked – most commonly women – and related child custody matters and elder abuse, who have no recourse to defend themselves if the police are not directly involved or present.

Clients are attended by assigned guards who are specifically trained in threat assessment and counterassault techniques, which can be delivered by either a highly visible guard in a marked patrol vehicle, including a canine, which is, of course, a German shepherd as a partner, or as a plainclothes, undercover bodyguard. The individual situation will determine the type of service best suited to the circumstances. Referrals are received through police social agencies and by private contact. The foundation mainly assists

individuals in the Edmonton area but has now established a 1-800 number to assist in all areas of the province.

Thank you.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona on a Standing Order 40 application.

Housing for the Homeless

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly, in light of the skyrocketing numbers of homeless persons throughout the province, urges the government to dedicate a portion of its ballooning surplus to provide direct funding to nonprofit community groups to build and operate safe and affordable housing for the homeless.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the House to give unanimous consent of the Assembly to debate this motion, which is a matter of urgent and pressing necessity. This request is pursuant to Standing Order 40.

As to the urgency and pressing necessity of this motion, Mr. Speaker, this motion is certainly the result of the release and receipt by me of a report just released by the Edmonton Homeless Count Committee. The title of the report is A Count of Homeless Persons in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers are, indeed, chilling. Between March and November of this year – March was the month when the first count in this city was taken. Between then and now there has been an alarming increase in the numbers of people who are homeless. The latest count stands at 1,114 persons who, according to this report, are homeless. This is a dramatic increase of 33.25 percent over the last nine months. It's such an important matter because, with the winter upon us, with the very, very cold part of the winter setting in, with Christmas around the corner, we find this very large number of our fellow citizens – children, people over 65, young people between the ages of 18 and 24, families, and single persons – exposed to terribly serious risks. These are people at risk, as a matter of fact. Their lives as well as their health are at stake.

Just to draw attention to the composition of this group, with your permission, for the adults between the ages of 19 and 24, Mr. Speaker, the number has grown from 586 in March to 807. These are people of working age, these are people willing to work, and yet they don't have any homes, any shelter whatsoever. Again, 111 persons in this latest count happen to be children with no shelter whatsoever. The aboriginal population, which constitutes no more than perhaps 8 percent of the city's population: 36 percent of the 1,114 people are of aboriginal background and ancestry. So there are certain groups which are really, I think, exposed to an extreme danger.

I, therefore, stand here today to call on my colleagues to give unanimous consent so that we can debate this matter and urge the government to provide resources on an immediate basis to prevent tragedy that's very likely to happen if this large number of people have no place to go when it's minus 30 and minus 25 or even minus 10 outside. Even at minus 10 I don't know how these people survive in subzero temperatures, but once the really cold temperatures come in, these people will be seriously at risk. They're likely to lose their lives, they're likely to lose their health, and they're already extremely poor and devastated. So I call on this House, Mr. Speaker, to give unanimous consent so that we can debate the needed solutions to this problem on an urgent and immediate basis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Assembly has before it a Standing Order 40 petition put forward by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. Two questions will be asked. Would all those members in favour of proceeding with the Standing Order 40 submission please say aye?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Second Reading

Bill 43

Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 1999

[Adjourned debate December 2: Mr. Magnus]

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure to take this opportunity this afternoon to stand and speak on the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act. This is the act that is going to allow the government to increase expenditures in areas that are important to the public, yet the focus that we have to take in dealing with this debate is whether or not the amendment as such is adequate, is appropriate. I guess the need of it also has to be looked at, and the means that we do that is by looking at how it is going to change the sections of the act in terms of removing the commitment that the Fiscal Responsibility Act created to use 75 percent of the surplus to pay down the debt of the province.

What we have to do, then, is look at it from the perspective of how the amendment now is going to be able to deal with giving us an appropriate parameter, an appropriate look at how we're going to be able to do that and whether or not the amendment will actually improve the act for future applications. On the second part there I think we can see that effectively the bill, because it does put in place an exemption of \$600 million only for the one fiscal year, does not really set about to improve the focus of the act. It doesn't set out to provide for the kind of flexibility in the act that is illustrated by the very need for this amendment act.

The original bill was put in place and created a very rigid limit and a rigid structure on how we were going to be able to deal with any surplus. In the end we find now that, because of the growing demand for onetime dollars, the provision of the bill was not flexible enough to allow us to meet those in the context of public need. So what we're doing now, effectively, is not addressing the inflexibility of the act; we're just making an amendment that will allow us to deal with that kind of change for one year on its own. So what we'll have is the same situation again next year, where we'll be restrained by the same kind of parameters. What we need to do, then, is look at it from the perspective of whether or not this amendment really does much to improve the bill, or is it just a manoeuvre to allow us to meet needs in a given year?

3:00

This one-year exemption effectively has been provided for, and it will be now committed through the supplementary supply act, and this is going to be then divided up and allocated to the appropriate purposes for the onetime expenditures. The interesting thing is that in conjunction with this we're allowing the Provincial Treasurer or

the government to also increase expenditures to the agriculture community through the declaration of a disaster classification for the farm income disaster dollars that are needed to support the new, revised version of that farm income disaster program. This was a provision that was in the Fiscal Responsibility Act in the sense that the parameters of that act that restricted the 25-75 breakout had an exemption for disaster programs. So effectively what we've done is allow for an increase in dollars to support the agriculture community that are not accounted for in the \$600 million increase that is being proposed with this bill.

Now, Mr. Speaker, what we look at is the way that the farm income disaster program has been changed. It looks now like the program, because of its new structure and the disaster declaration that was associated with it to get it included under that component of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, is going to be only available to farmers in the areas where disasters have been declared, or will it still be available to all farmers, and then we'll have to see how this is going to be divided up and broken out so the original dollars that were put in the budget can be used under the original parameters. Will the new dollars that'll be available because of the disaster classification be now available to support the program in those areas where disasters have been declared?

So this is a complication, I think, that's come about because of the way we're playing with words in the various bills. Mr. Speaker, what I would suggest is that as we look at this bill in second reading and talk about the principles of it, we should be looking at whether or not this amendment really does much to improve the bill or whether it does, as I've said before, create just a onetime opportunity not to operate under the parameters of the bill. I think it would be more appropriate if we looked at the structure of this bill and talked about it in the context of how do we conduct a debate, how do we conduct an analysis of the validity of any surplus that results at the various quarterly reports, how do we determine the priorities for the onetime expenditures, and secondly, at what level of public need does it trigger an appropriate action that would allow us to change the parameters of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, rather than look at it from the perspective after the fact of coming back and now dealing with changes that have to occur in the context of the very rigid restrictions that were put into it. So, I guess from that, Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that it would be more appropriate for us to look at amending the act to put in place a set of parameters that would deal with priority setting and the aspect of public need in terms of how we deal with the surpluses.

In the context of the communications that have come to my constituency office I would suggest that one of the things that we need to put in there as well is looking at the true relationship between revenues and expenditures, whether those revenues are expected on a continuing basis or whether they're a short-term anomaly or a cyclical pattern, and then what we need to do is also put into the debate maybe whether or not tax relief should be part of the action. I think we'd then have feedback from the public that would say: do we serve the needs of the province better by determining that some of this surplus now is an ongoing surplus, a structural surplus, and therefore should be dealt with in the context of either program expenditures or tax relief? I'm sure we would hear from a number of our constituents that within that context, in an open public debate, tax relief would be one of the issues that they would like to see included as an option for this kind of re-evaluation, a mid-term evaluation of the Fiscal Responsibility Act or the parameters and the execution of that act.

So what we've got now is basically an option here to debate a bill that's going to allow us only one option, and that is to increase onetime expenditures rather than to take the opportunity to amend

the bill to make it much more flexible and much more responsive to the kind of debate that the constituents that call my office are always asking for in the context of: "Well, you know, we're being told there are these kinds of surpluses within the provincial budget. How are they going to be used?" So what we need to do is deal with it in a much broader perspective to address their issues. I don't feel that this amendment act does that in the sense that it's giving us a very limited debate on how we can deal with looking at and allocating surpluses.

Mr. Speaker, I know the public recognizes the need for and the importance of paying down debt, but they also look at the critical needs we have right now in some of our program areas. They also look at the benefits that would accrue both to their personal well-being and to the economic growth of the province if we could get some tax changes. So what we've got to do, then, is look at how that kind of debate can be built into the ongoing operation of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. Putting in a onetime exemption to the tune of \$600 million doesn't provide for either that debate or the flexibility that the people of my constituency, at least, are asking for when we talk about what's going on and how this bill is being amended.

So with those comments on the context of the bill, I think what we've got to do is look at how the process can be made better. Right now we're talking here about changes to the Fiscal Responsibility Act, but most of that has to tie into what we also see in Bill 45, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, because that is the one that goes back and relates the actual breakdown and the priorities that were put on how that \$600 million is allocated. By separating the two of them out into separate bills and separate functions, we don't have the kind of debate that would be appropriate if we were truly talking about creating a Fiscal Responsibility Act that was responsive, that was truly usable for the people of Alberta, and that they could understand that it had parameters. This almost responding to concerns of certain sectors of the public seems to make a number of people in my constituency, at least, a little bit cynical in the sense that they feel that the dollars aren't spent in the way that they would like to see them prioritized, yet they don't see how they can have that input in a public way to determine when the changes are going to be made and how those changes can be brought about.

3:10

So what we've got, then, is essentially a reflection here that as we look at the role and the function of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, we have to look at it in the context of how can we develop this kind of living budget. The quarterly updates are a very important component of that because they keep us on track, they keep us mindful of the fact that not all predictions are totally accurate when you're dealing with a year in the future. Two years in the future is just kind of taking a guess, and once you get beyond that, you're really just pulling a number out of the sky when we're talking about economic growth numbers and the impact that the different parameters can take, especially when our revenues are so closely tied to the natural resource sector where we have an oligopoly controlling world prices in that particular area. We see that they can dreadfully and very quickly change the whole scenario and the whole perspective of the world as it relates to revenues that come to us from the sale of those oil-based products.

So if we had to develop some kind of process that would look at having a living budgeting process, the Fiscal Responsibility Act does deal with the concept of just flat line reductions if there appears to be a deficit and then this 25-75 percent allocation if there is a surplus projected. Those are very rigid in the context of public input. They are very rigid in the context of allowing for the true analysis of whether or not the causes behind either those deficits or surpluses

are short term or whether they're truly structural and can be dealt with on a long-term basis.

It's important, then, that we reflect on the fact that this amendment doesn't do much to improve the Fiscal Responsibility Act but could be essentially the forerunner or the precipitator of a series of debates and a series of discussions that could eventually lead to a much better act.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents are even cynical enough to ask why we have such an act if we're just going to change it, at the whim, on a good budget so that we can meet the needs. In essence, what we've got to do is deal with it from the perspective of how sound it is and how truly it reflects the way the people of Alberta want their budgets and their budgeting process to be carried out.

I would dare to say that most of them would find this to be a very rigid process, a very constraining process, to address Alberta and Alberta's budgeting the way they would see as being useful. If we look at it in the final perspective, Mr. Speaker, what we've got to do is look at it in the context that this piece of legislation in its original form was designed and has now been confirmed to be basically just a piece of political legislation, because it's being changed at a whim and it's not being used to provide us with a real open and direct process of managing and controlling the budgeting process in our province.

We need to reflect fully that it is possible that some of this debate would occur in the context of next year's budgeting process, but that puts it into a yearly cycle. It would be better, then, to deal with it in the interim just as we do have the checks and balances that are associated with the quarterly reports on that yearly basis as well.

One of the main fears of the onetime expenditure scenario is that this leads us to a situation where we're going to be dealing with onetime expenditures – most of that has to be infrastructure by nature – and we're then going to be putting dollars into the creation of infrastructure at a time when the economy is heated. That's what is the precipitator of surpluses: economies that are growing more rapidly and performing better than what we were projecting. So that effectively means a growing or a very high-capacity economy. Then we're going to be spending our public dollars on infrastructure and onetime expenditures at a time when prices are probably as high as they could be in the context of the economic cycle.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I would just like to say that in the context of changing the Fiscal Responsibility Act, I find that this process and the changes that are made through the parameters outlined in Bill 43 don't really improve the act. What they do is make a onetime exemption possibility so that the political needs, if you want to call them that, of a few sectors can be addressed. Now, we'll deal with the validity and the priority of those sectors in the debate on Bill 45, but that's not how we need to look at it in the context of this bill.

So with that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my comments and allow someone else to address the issue.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand in the Assembly today giving my viewpoints at second reading of Bill 43, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act. It's very surprising that a few short months ago in this Assembly we were watching a bill be pushed through here at a very quick pace. All of a sudden here we are again. This government continues in terms of illustrating poor budget management and business planning. The government's fiscal management system ignores the high differences that we have in this province around the Alberta economy. The variety

is mainly due to the reliance on commodity-based industries such as petroleum, forestry, and agriculture. The high level of economic variability translates into an unstable revenue base, making revenue forecasting extremely difficult and requiring prudent spending choices that can be sustained over the planning period.

The AAMD and C and the AUMA in the past few weeks in particular have been concerned with the release of figures, that they're saying, of \$111 million in extra taxes, which is around the education tax. Yet we seem to see taxes going up. We seem to see a puffball answer coming back from the government of a 5 and 10 percent cap. Why not just freeze it? Why is such a large province being lumped together in market value, and is it working?

The Treasurer likes to say that his unbudgeted spending is due to the population growth over the past year. Don't we have a plan for growth and infrastructure into the next year already? Aren't we looking at five years? Anybody running a business today would be planning anywhere from five to 12 years.

You know, why do we need a bill to be proper managers or to have a fiscal budget to operate this province? Whether we have \$12 per barrel or \$27 per barrel, we should be projecting some of these things. I know that it's extreme, but maybe if we'd start budgeting and dealing with our infrastructure deficits, we'd be much further ahead.

Certainly there were strong views and a strong agreement that the deficit that had accrued in Alberta by the early 1990s needed to be eliminated. This government chose to take the deficit that had accumulated, and through a reduction in its transfer payments to local governments that deficit was handed down to them. We've been able to quantify that decision by the government in our questions and our debates over the past couple of sessions, when we are in the Assembly, and especially in the spring session. The government basically off-loaded onto regional health authorities, our school boards, and our municipalities the deficit that has been carried by them. As a result, our school boards are now carrying a deficit, having to lay off teachers, cut resource personnel, and increase class sizes: all of those kinds of things that we do when we are strapped for cash. Yet we saw a bill come forward this past spring that said: this is the way we are going to spend, 75 and 25.

3:20

Going back, we have seen regional health authorities carrying deficits. Government is now spending more than it was when the cutting began, yet services have been deteriorating. We also see municipalities carrying deficits, and given that that's not a legal option for them, the deficit is being carried in the form of roads that are not being repaired or maintained or built to a level that the growth of this province would dictate.

This government for the past six years in their downloading and offloading, while paying down a debt created by the province, has created a hidden deficit. In debates over the last couple of years I have quite often referred to the type of budgeting that is happening as a one-string guitar. Now we see that they have added one or two strings, because they've got a bit more money, but they haven't learned how to play this instrument with a plan.

Where's the plan, Mr. Speaker? Just think: a plan for the next millennium, a plan that Albertans could all look at and be looking forward to, thinking that we do live in a great province, and we all know that we do live in a great province. In recent days the two major cities in our province as well as Lethbridge announced that their property taxes are going to be going up, yet there is another level of downloading, but this one is on the individuals. During the spring session we highlighted some of these individuals who've been impacted by the downloading in the province.

The education tax is an ongoing problem, and the committee, as I said before, still hasn't solved anything. Have they traveled the province? No. When we are talking about education, children are one of the groups directly impacted by larger class sizes, inadequate services, mental health as an example. But so are individuals on the other end of the age scale, our seniors. While our senior citizens appreciate the recognition this past spring of the United Nations International Year of Older Persons, they are one of the groups that has been hurt the worst in this whole country: their health, their housing, their glasses, their medical, their taxes.

What has been happening with the hidden deficit over the last few years is the fact that municipalities have been raising their taxes through another system, and that is through user fees. Similarly, with a critical shortage of continuing care beds for seniors right across the province, many families are correspondingly providing the care and the support for seniors at home that they cannot get from this province. Today I tabled a letter that talked about a family in my constituency where the woman taught right up until the end of last June but is dying right now and can't get home care. Her husband works at a plant out in Strathcona, and he's having to take time off to be with the family. Where is home care?

Mr. Speaker, within six months this government has turned the Fiscal Responsibility Act into a fiscal irresponsibility act, if you want to call it that. What happened to the fiscal discipline and business planning process that the Provincial Treasurer was preaching about in February 1999? Obviously, with the need to make changes to the allocation formula for the economic cushion, the government must have determined that imposing fiscal discipline and business planning on itself was a hundred percent harder than it was six months ago. The proposal to override the allocation formula, even on a temporary basis, is nothing more than the exasperation of a crisis-based pressure-point approach to a budget practice that this government has pioneered over the past six years. It's not a continued adjustment or an override of the allocation formula for the economic cushion that is important for ensuring fiscal discipline. Proper business planning, effective performance measurements, honest forecasting are major, major items that should be underlined and totally thought about. Honest forecasting and reporting on results are what is needed, not a change to the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

We need fundamental changes to the budget management process in Alberta to create certainty, predictability, stability, and sustainability for our local authorities. Over the years members on our side have proposed a number of other elements to improve the credibility and stability of the budget planning process, to sustain our core programs in health care and education, and to ensure the fiscal and human balance in both good times and bad.

These elements include – and they're not very hard to really drive at – number one, amendments that require the government to table monthly budget updates so that Albertans know where they stand on a regular basis; number two, establish a ministry performance measurement and a benchmark for our variance between budget and actual revenue similar to what has been done in different parts of the United States, requiring in the budget the preparation of a fiscal strategy report with a 10-year trend for a major fiscal and economic indicator. As I mentioned before, businesses do not even forecast what is happening on a one-year term. They are basing their budget plans on five to 12 years. The third one is to establish a fiscal stabilization fund, which would ensure that the strategic investments undertaken in the health care and education systems are sustainable over the long term, not relying on the up-and-down economy and revenue, which seem to guide our budgeting system or decision-making, particularly on the program side of the ledger. A fiscal

stabilization fund would introduce greater stability and certainty in the budget process in Alberta to allow us to sustain our core social programs, which are the backbone of our competitiveness in society.

Now, where do we go on this? Well, we can actually really be asking a number of questions. One of the main problems mentioned before is that this government has had improper budget management. They didn't manage to cut properly in health or education, they can't effectively manage to reinvest, but they are talking about maybe a new bill coming out and going private, because they are out of the bricks and mortar.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, whether or not we have bricks and mortar, we have to have a plan, reinvestment into what is best. There is a place for government. It might not be in liquor stores, and you might say that it might not have been in the highways, but they haven't proved that the minister of the day's 20 percent saving has actually come through and shown Alberta that it can be saved. It's laughable to hear the Premier and the Treasurer talk about infrastructure as onetime spending. Only a fool would believe that infrastructure investments are one time.

What does the government propose to do? Build long-term care facilities, schools, and then let them fall down? Roads, bridges, and schools have been maintained and repaired. We've had a good record in this province of maintaining them. The Auditor General in his annual report this year said that

capital expenditures do not occur in isolation – they create a stream of subsequent operating costs that are often not fully recognized at the time of the original investment.

That is why a long-term maintenance and repair plan for infrastructure is required. The onetime infrastructure grant is nothing more than a \$600 million patch for a multibillion-dollar pothole this government has created through downloading and offloading on municipalities, school boards, postsecondary institutions, and regional health authorities over the past six years. The government has failed to develop a provincial strategy on infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is to amend the 25 percent allocation. Just think what would happen if their promise of their spending failed? I'm not wanting the bill to fail, but as an Albertan I do wonder where actually we are going and why we're not there now, why we're not producing a plan that we can go forth with. We didn't have to produce a bill and a second bill in one fiscal year.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, let's thank the Albertans who have been the receivers of the lack of a plan, the lack of any foresight, the lack of any future plan. They are those in health, education, the municipal leaders, and everybody else out there that is still waiting for this government to go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:30

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to have the opportunity today to speak to Bill 43, the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment Act, 1999, an act that follows the amendment acts of 1998, '97, '96, '95, '94, and '93, as long as I've been in this Legislature.

It's unfortunate that this is the way the Treasurer feels he has to run his department. Certainly I won't be supporting this amendment, Mr. Speaker, which is requesting a change in the allocation formula for the economic cushion that the Treasurer has created in this province. The add-on to the formula we think is nothing more

than a pure manipulation of the province's finances to legitimize a crisis-based pressure-point approach to budget management and business planning, the same type of management process that this government has used since 1993.

Certainly what it shows me is that this government has a lack of fiscal discipline and a lack of commitment to three-year business planning, which is contrary to what they say, Mr. Speaker. I know that they repeatedly talk in and outside this Legislature about how great the three-year planning process is, and a three-year planning process is great if, in fact, it's followed. But this government has made a mockery of that particular system by the way they budget within the system and by the way they hoard surplus dollars and then decide at some point in time that they want to dump those dollars back into the economy and into the system.

Having to bring in an amendment act like this is what happens, Mr. Speaker, when the government brings in poor legislation in the first place, and we saw that when they brought in the original legislation that talked about how they were going to budget in this province. It's very unfortunate that they would do this, because Alberta has an opportunity, I think, to be a role model government for all governments globally, not just in Canada as a provincial government. They could set their sights a lot higher than that. With the kinds of revenues they have had at their disposal in this province, they could have really done some landmark decision-making planning, and they could have used this as an opportunity to really set themselves apart from the way other governments have run in a very progressive fashion and, in fact, in the kind of business way that they talk about doing but which they don't actually apply.

We talk about this government all the time in terms of the business model, because this is how they like to portray themselves, as having a business perspective. You know, they're very dollars-and-cents oriented, and they're going to provide maximum benefit for the services with the dollars they've got. But, Mr. Speaker, that isn't what happens at all. This government is in the business, I would state, of providing dollars for core services and infrastructure throughout this province. In doing that, they're making a commitment, a covenant, if you will, with the people of this province that they are going to provide those dollars for core services and infrastructure in a fashion that will give the best possible service and the best possible infrastructure that dollars can buy in the system.

To do that, if you're going to get the best bang for the buck, if you will, what has to happen is that they need to make a commitment to those that they're passing the dollars on to, to do so in a regular and consistent and planned process. That isn't what happens here. What they do is underfund every core service that this government is responsible for, and then they expect those service providers to provide efficient and effective service. Well, that's not possible, Mr. Speaker. You can't be underfunded continually and then be expected to be as efficient as possible or as effective as possible. Then when pressure builds up from outside sources and the government dumps money back into the system, these providers have to accommodate that, and once again that leads to neither efficiency nor effectiveness.

You wouldn't run your household budget like that, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is very fond of making those kinds of analogies in his speaking. But you'd never do that. You'd never say that even though I'm making a net income of \$2,000 a month, I'm only going to give the household \$1,000, and when you scream loud enough because the children are hungry, then I'm going to dump in another \$500 and continue to hoard the rest until some future time when it may be more strategic for me to give those hoarded dollars to another family, someone outside our own, because that would give me whatever it is that the government is looking for, which, of

course, is political gain in this particular instance. It isn't a proper way to run a household. It certainly isn't a proper way to run a province.

I would state that this government has the knowledge, the understanding, and the information available to them to do this right. Certainly, people that work within the departments have an excellent background in what they're doing. They have the knowledge, they have the ability, and they have the research capacity to budget properly in this province. So the question then, Mr. Speaker, is: why don't they do that?

MR. SAPERS: That's a good question.

MS CARLSON: Well, I think it's a good question too. If they have all this knowledge and ability to build a good budgetary process, then why don't they do it in this province? You can't say that it's because it's a government with a new tenure. After 30 years they should have figured it out. You can't say that it's because there's a new Treasurer in place. They've been running budgets like this forever and a day. You can't say that it's because there's been a huge turnover in the staff of Treasury. That isn't the case, Mr. Speaker. So then why don't they do it properly? They don't do it properly, Mr. Speaker, because they don't want to. It doesn't fit in with their strategic plan.

Then what is the plan? The plan as I've seen it here by observation and by experience during the years that I've been elected to this Legislature is for this government to create an environment for balloon surpluses to occur so that they can reward and punish departments, individuals, groups, organizations as they see fit, Mr. Speaker. We've seen this reward-and-punish type of process occur year after year after year. In fact, that is precisely what this amendment speaks to, creating a situation where now that they have some surplus dollars, they want to put them back in the system, not in a planned and organized fashion, not in a fashion that is going to participate in making this province a better province or providing the ongoing kind of funding for services or infrastructure that is so dearly needed in this province but based on their reward-and-punishment process.

3:40

What does this do for recipients of this money? Whether we're talking about municipalities who desperately need infrastructure dollars and who have faced the pressure of downloading for the past six years by this government, whether we're talking about health care that's been chronically underfunded and where they've created a situation that's absolutely ripe for two-tiered American-style health care to come in, whether we're talking about the education system where we're seeing the pressures that our children are being faced with now as the teachers within the system are reacting to the underfunding problem, what does all of this create?

I think this creates an environment, Mr. Speaker, where we are losing some of the very key success factors that have been a part of this province's history that are intangible and can't be bought but that are built and, in fact, have become the roots of a system in this province that used to be second to none. I would suggest that those key success factors are creativity, commitment, continuity in services and in memory and in history of what's gone on, pride in your work and in the accomplishments that individuals and organizations and groups have had in this province over the years. I would suggest to you that this chronic underfunding, these balloon payments, these kinds of amendments that come in and dump money back into the system have hurt the very basis of the strength that our province has been built on.

Let's take a look at some of these areas and see if these apply. If you chronically underfund education, Mr. Speaker, what happens to the teachers, to the frontline workers there who are providing the services? It used to be that they worked long hours. They still work long hours, but they used to have some preparation time and some ability to think and to provide the best possible services to the students that they could. They had time to be creative, they chose to be creative, they wanted to be creative, and they were creative. Now that they have the kinds of pressures faced by them, they don't even have time to react to the classroom. They don't have time to provide the kinds of services that they used to. Their spirit is being squashed by this process, and there just isn't anything left there in terms of creativity to be able to draw on, to provide the kinds of role models that our kids need, to provide the kind of future for our children that will make them competitive in a global marketplace. Other jurisdictions, other countries are doing this, so we are going to be at a competitive disadvantage in the very near future because of this.

What about continuity, Mr. Speaker? Let's take a look at health care for that. Let's take a look at nurses and doctors. I don't have much exposure to the health care system, but even I am appalled at the times that I've been called to the hospital on a Friday or Saturday night – and I'm talking about the Grey Nuns hospital in Mill Woods – by people who cannot get in for service, for care in that hospital because there are no beds. Why aren't there enough beds? It goes back to a lack of staffing at the Grey Nuns in particular. Because of the cutbacks that were made in health care, many nurses left the profession. Because of the types of strategies that the government pursued in terms of bumping and other issues like that that have been around for a few years in health care, many nurses left the profession, and with them leaves the history, the continuity of care.

Along with that, we've seen that happen with many doctors. Many doctors who don't like the kind of chronic underfunding that we've seen in the health care system and who know that the system cannot adapt to these balloon payments that are dumped on them, which this amendment specifically addresses, have left the province, Mr. Speaker, and with them we've lost some of the continuity of care, the history. A lot of the doctors that I know that have left were doctors who had longstanding practices in this province, were specialists in their field and had unique areas of expertise that all of the patients and all of the other health care workers that worked with them benefited from, and we've lost that forever. You don't get it back in a day or an hour or a moment. It takes decades to build up that kind of experience, and we've lost that continuity.

What about commitment, Mr. Speaker? Think of yourself in the kinds of jobs that you held as a young person or perhaps later on in your career. If you were constantly underfunded, constantly under pressure that you wouldn't have that job, what's your commitment going to be like in that situation? You lose commitment to the work that you're doing if you feel that you are constantly being devalued, and that's what this kind of budgetary process does. It devalues not just the organizations, not just the services that are being provided but the very people that are delivering the service, the very people that need to be recognized for the outstanding service that they do provide to us.

If you devalue them, how are they going to have pride in their work and accomplishments, and how are they going to excel in times when they don't have enough money or enough time or they have to make do with what they have? There is no incentive to do that, Mr. Speaker, so we are losing all of those components that, I would state, have provided in the past key success factors to the functioning of our government and this province and the people and the children who live here. It's really too bad that's happened, but the Treasurer doesn't seem to consider that to be any reason for concern, because

he continually comes forward in this fashion in terms of lack of respect for a proper budgetary process.

I'd like now to move to some of the comments that the Treasurer has made with regard to this process and talk about them. We can never as the Official Opposition in this province responsibly agree to increase the portion of the economic cushion that can be used to fund in-year spending initiatives and tax reductions. But this Treasurer seems to be quite happy to stand up and often talk, what seems to me, out of both sides of his mouth on the issue.

His comments back on February 23, 1999, in debate on the Fiscal Responsibility Act seem to highlight this. He said then, when talking about the 25 percent allocation formula, the one that we are now amending:

Twenty-Five percent of that will be available to us for items like infrastructure, pressures, and onetime capital spending that is in place already. There will be a plan where we can see in an orderly way what we can do to accelerate some of our infrastructure costs.

So the plan is simple yet detailed . . .

and this is the part that I find of most interest,

. . . but it builds in the fiscal discipline in terms of our own planning process. Every minister who's planning their budgetary spending has to realize that we have three-year business plans in place, that they're being reinforced by this particular act. This puts teeth in the three-year business planning process and puts discipline in our own particular planning [process].

Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting the Treasurer feels that he has to legislate discipline in a planning process in a government that has billions of dollars of revenue at its disposal. Certainly no other organization that I know of feels they have to revert to legislating discipline when it comes to dollars and cents. That's a core responsibility of people tasked with budgeting for the money and the subsequent spending of those moneys. It calls into question the very abilities of those making those decisions when the Treasurer thinks he needs to legislate discipline with the departments that his own colleagues and cabinet ministers are responsible for.

Then what he's saying by this statement is: "Beware, colleagues. You have a three-year business plan, and you're supposed to stick to it. There's going to be 25 percent of the money available for discretionary items," as he is labeling them, "pressures and onetime capital spending. No more, no less. So budget according to that, and then line up and lobby me for that 25 percent balloon that's going to be available at some point in time." That's what he said in the spring.

Now, a few short months later the rules have changed, Mr. Speaker. No longer is he expecting these same cabinet ministers to be content with the 25 percent. No longer is he reinforcing the discipline that he talked about in the spring. Now there's a new set of rules, and there's a new list that you need to line up for, with your hand out, for moneys for whatever project that these ministers are lobbying for. So why have the rules changed?

You bring in legislation, you establish a set of rules, you expect discipline in terms of that, and you expect people to follow the three-year business plans. Not bad goals, all of those, but all of a sudden now the rules change. So I would like the Provincial Treasurer to explain why he does that. It's unbelievable. [interjection] We have a cabinet minister here, Mr. Speaker, who would like to enter into the debate and is quite happy to sit back in his chair in a very complacent way and heckle but not actually speak to the issues.

3:50

Those are: how can you have a certain set of rules debated in this Legislature, passed by a majority vote, and then changed a few months later? The rules are changed. How can that be? What are the people of this province supposed to expect from a government

who, when they feel like it, will change the way they spend money in this province? We're not saying that there aren't very many places where the money is needed, because there are. [Ms Carlson's speaking time expired] Unfortunately, I'll have to come back.

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

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Just phone in, Gary; just phone in.

MR. DICKSON: I've been encouraged to phone in my comments. Well, next Saturday maybe. I'm not sure; it sounded like the Premier's phone-in program on Saturday was the last one we'll see until 2000. Maybe he won't do it anymore. Maybe there'll be a different screening process, so I'm going to take advantage of this opportunity right now to make some observations.

When I looked at this bill, I thought it would be interesting to see – you can read the text in a bill, but it often doesn't give you a spirit of why this thing has come forward, so what I like to do is reference *Hansard* and hear some of the proponents of the bill make the case for why this is necessary.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I was in luck, because I happened to find that on December 2, 1999, the Minister of Government Services rallied to the defence of the beleaguered Provincial Treasurer. Nobody ever accused our Minister of Government Services of backing away from a fight, and true to form, she stood in her place and offered a very, very vigorous defence of Bill 43. In the course of her vigorous defence, she made this observation: "Our Provincial Treasurer is a fiscal hawk." I thought to myself: a fiscal hawk. Then I sort of had visions, but I could imagine a hawk with a broken wing and one that couldn't get very high, sort of circling around, maybe a hawk with a bit of a vision problem, because he couldn't quite see all the terrain below. You could barely get over the edge of the cliff, so all you could see were a couple of big boulders around you, and you lacked the opportunity that a healthy hawk would have of being able to see the whole valley and start appreciating how the things fit together.

You know, it was interesting that the Minister of Government Services was not alone in thinking of a bird when she thought of the Provincial Treasurer. In fact, this may have been who Bob Rae, the former Ontario Premier, had in mind when he said: "When one's left wing is not working, one tends to fly around in circles a great deal." Now, nobody I know of has ever suggested that our Provincial Treasurer had a strong left wing, so perhaps this is exactly what we've identified here. We have a fiscal hawk but something of a crippled fiscal hawk flying around in circles, unable to view the whole territory.

DR. TAYLOR: Watch he doesn't deposit something on your head.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it would be a hawk.

You know, when you go to Medicine Hat, one of the great communities in this province, you see that magnificent valley over the river. In fact, you see hawks in the Medicine Hat valley, but most of those hawks have the ability to see the entire landscape, the entire horizon. That isn't the case that would obtain here in this case.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker. When you look at the Fiscal Responsibility Act, that the government would have us amend in this Assembly, and you look at the bottom of the revised statutes, what they do is print the date down there. All members may be wondering what the date would be for the Fiscal Responsibility Act, chapter

F-11.5. The date is "July 18, 1999." That's the date that this statute came into force. So we start thinking again: what kind of a fiscal hawk would promote and bring in a piece of legislation that five months later we're coming in to make huge, fundamental changes to?

This puts me in mind of the concern and the disquiet I've always felt about bills like the Fiscal Responsibility Act. They purport to do something that really isn't appropriate for a piece of legislation. They purport to impose a kind of discipline on a government. It seems to me that it's sort of in the nature of sloganeering. It's sort of in the nature of propagandizing. You bring in a piece of legislation with a lofty sounding title that appears to constrain. It's sort of like the government collectively is putting its hands voluntarily into some kind of a straightjacket or handcuffs. In fact, what you find, Mr. Speaker, is that the government really has no intention of being bound. The bill is only there as long as it suits the purposes, which may change from month to month or half year to half year.

So what we've got with a bill like this and with this amendment: it really shows how inadequate a piece of legislation is to try and impose good management, self-discipline on a provincial government. It doesn't work. Maybe it was a grand experiment. Maybe this was a bold experiment that was worth while trying. But now we look at five months after the bill goes into force, and we see that it simply doesn't do the trick.

Maybe it's time, while we're in second reading of Bill 43, to look and say: maybe this just isn't the way to do it. Maybe what Albertans really require is an astute provincial government, a government that is able to assert a kind of discipline in its practices and in its programs, but create it within that government so that we don't deal with the fancy sloganeering and maybe we don't have the bill that we trumpet as binding the hands of government. It's all nonsense anyway, Mr. Speaker, because as you know better than anyone in this Assembly, a Legislature is always sovereign. The only piece of legislation I can think of that binds our hands is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but because of section 33 and the notwithstanding clause even that isn't completely binding.

Legislatures can do whatever they darn well please. What they decide this week can be undone next week. What they do this month can be undone next month. What they bring into force in July of 1999 can be undone in December of 1999. Let's say that the emperor has no clothes. Let's say that this means of legislation, of lawmaking, is really an illusion. I think we see that illusion now for what it is.

I know that the Provincial Treasurer and his colleagues would say: so who would you deny money to? That's a bit of a nonsensical argument, because it's been the opposition that's been saying for a long time that we need adequate funding of our core services, the same kind of message that the men and women who came and participated in Red Deer in the growth summit said: we need adequate support; we need long-term planning.

What we've got with this bill, it seems to me – the point that has not adequately been made before is just that these bills don't really achieve the purpose I think they're put there for. Really what we need is a steely will, a stiffened spine on the part of the government collectively. That's really what Albertans are asking for, and I think that's what they require.

The Minister of Government Services – and I don't mean to pick on her – made the most provocative comments that I'd noticed around Bill 43. At page 2229 of *Hansard* the minister suggested that this bill "does respond to the pressures of growth, the pressures of a changing system, and the pressures of need." Then she went on to say what for me is the most fascinating observation: "Nobody in this House understands the pressures of growth more than this caucus."

4:00

When I heard that observation at second reading by the Minister of Government Services, I thought to myself: if that were truly the case, is it possible that the University of Calgary's salaries would put us no higher than 22nd on a list of the largest 25 universities in Canada? That's an embarrassment. In a city like Calgary, where you're developing a robust high-tech industry, where you've got a lot of knowledge-based economy being apparent, the University of Calgary professors are paid no higher than 22nd out of the top 25 universities. I'm embarrassed by that.

What does that say about the observation that nobody understands the pressures of growth better than the government caucus? If that were the case, would it be that in the city of Calgary the last CRHA management report on hospital beds identified that they have 98 percent occupancy? What's more, at 6 a.m. the number of people who present at emergency looking for a hospital bed in the three adult hospitals in the Calgary region has gone up something like 380 percent from last year to this year in terms of the number of people looking for a hospital bed, and they can't find it because of the 98 percent occupancy rate.

If in fact the Minister of Government Services was accurate in saying that nobody understands the pressures of growth better than the government caucus, how can it be that we have yet another MLA task force looking at school funding? You know, as long as I've been an MLA, it seems to me that in a high-growth area like the city of Calgary there have been huge pressures. It doesn't take, I think, a great amount of savvy or intelligence or awareness to see that there are going to be huge pressures. The government can claim credit, if they wish, for these people moving to Calgary. It's the third most attractive city for recent immigrants. You're seeing this huge population increase, but nothing of this is new. I mean, I just may be a little dim-witted, but . . .

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

MR. DICKSON: I'm always surprised. I'm glad there's something that my colleagues agree with me about.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that any capable, competent government would have been able to see those pressures coming. If you talk to people on the school boards and people in the city of Calgary, they've been doing projections probably as far back as when a couple of members in this Assembly were in fact on Calgary city council. They did that planning. They knew what was happening; they were tracking it. Now to have the government come in and say: well, we've sort of been taken by surprise by the fact that Calgary added 70,000 in 26 months; we just had no way of knowing it.

Mr. Speaker, you might not know the precise details of the changes, but all kinds of other people with much smaller budgets, much smaller bureaucracies have been able to do far more precise planning in terms of anticipated needs and what would be required to deal with them, and it amazes me that our provincial government hasn't been able to do that. Why is that? Is that evidence of a great understanding by the government caucus of the pressures of growth? I think not. The fact that after the fact government comes along and proposes to put in some additional cash doesn't give me a whole lot of satisfaction, because it comes grudgingly. It comes long after it was required. It comes after all kinds of people have been adversely affected. That impact has been on children in overcrowded classrooms. It's had to do with young people that haven't been able to get the quality of education from our postsecondary institutions. Is that cause for celebration? Of course it isn't.

There are some things that can and have to be done to get us away from this kind of showman bills like Bill 43, the kinds of construc-

tive suggestions that have been made by the Alberta Liberal caucus, for example, amendments to require monthly budget updates to be tabled so Albertans know where they stand on a regular basis, not just on a quarterly basis. You know, we have people with considerable business acumen in this House. I look at the Minister of Gaming over there, a man who distinguished himself in our mutual city of Calgary in his business career long before he chose to run for elected office. In his business, Mr. Speaker, I bet you dollars to doughnuts that he insisted on having monthly projections and updates to his budget.

MR. SMITH: Every Friday.

MR. DICKSON: Well, he insists weekly. He's even more on the bit than the government, Mr. Speaker.

We would require an independent assessment of provincial revenues by an independent source, compare those with the provincial Treasury. We might establish a ministry performance measure and benchmark for variance between budgeted and actual revenues.

I see our Associate Minister of Health and Wellness. I was hoping he might join in the debate. He might tell us what lessons we've learned from this that would apply to the business of persons with developmental disability boards. When the government comes along to talk about additional money, they don't acknowledge the fact that four of the last five years have been seriously underfunded. In fact, we've had to spend more money than was put in the budget, more evidence of inadequate planning.

The other thing that I'd like to see on behalf of my constituents in downtown Calgary would be preparation of a fiscal strategy report, something that would have 10-year trends. That would be a novel approach for a government that is changing legislation less than five months after it came into force. It's something to look at. Yet another recommendation would be a fiscal stabilization fund, something the Liberal opposition has championed for a long time. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to make those observations because I think it's important to offer some constructive, positive ideas in terms of things that could be done in Alberta.

Just to come back to where we started: "fiscal hawk," hardly. Hardly. The kinds of things we associate with a hawk in terms of incredible vision, single-minded focus and determination in terms of ensuring a strong, robust economy, an ability to see a long way into the future and do realistic and pragmatic projections are sadly lacking in this bill. That's a darn shame because there are Albertans who desperately need those kinds of elements and that kind of fiscal leadership.

So those are the comments I wanted to make at second reading of Bill 43. Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Provincial Treasurer to close debate.

MR. DAY: Mr. Speaker, it's very clear that the ability that we have this year – and we know for sure this year, but we don't know for sure next year – to do something substantial related to infrastructure in this province is something that should be moved upon. We would be seen, I would suggest, as delinquent, and if not delinquent, then as members of the opposition frequently say, as unrealistically, ideologically focused on debt reduction only.

If we did not address this area of the ongoing hidden structural deficit of infrastructure that municipalities are presently under, I guarantee we would be hearing from the opposition daily. They would be saying: how dare you neglect the very real pressures on the roads and the curbs and the sewage systems and the water systems?

Not only in terms of roadways, but they would be on their feet daily saying: there's an ability, an opportunity here to address facilities for long-term care, for our seniors, for our schools. They would be saying: you, Mr. Treasurer, are so ideologically fixed and focused and rabid about debt reduction only that the rest of the province is crumbling and decaying around our collective ears. That would be the battle cry of the opposition.

4:10

We have met throughout this last year with responsible, elected members of councils and jurisdictions, municipalities around this province. We have put together at their request and had been approached to deal with these infrastructure needs. We're able to say to the people of Alberta: we are not only meeting our debt requirements for this year on our budget, but in fact we're making an amount of debt down payment almost triple – almost triple – what we had anticipated making and reducing taxes at the same time.

So we've accelerated debt reduction, accelerated the tax reduction, and we have the ability. We don't know if we'll have it next year. We don't know what the price of oil is going to be. We don't know what the price of natural gas is going to be. Neither do the members of the opposition. Their projections were just about the same as ours on that along with the rest of the western world and the analysts throughout the world, in fact, in terms of making these projections.

Mr. Speaker, I think what we are doing is listening to our partners in the municipalities, listening to the people who administer the health care needs in the regional health authorities. We're listening to the school boards, and we're also listening to Albertans who said: if you have the opportunity and you have the kind of fiscal room, here is where we'd like to see it. So debt reduction, tax reduction, increases in other areas that were absolutely necessary, and now the ability to do this out for the next three years is an eminently prudent fiscal approach.

I must say that we take some level of concern with the nature of the attack upon us for meeting the needs around the province. I would ask the members of the opposition to formally take those arguments to the mayor of Calgary, to the mayor of Edmonton, to the mayor of Red Deer, out to the rural areas in north and south Alberta. We will be sharing with the mayors and the councillors around this province that the Liberals were opposed to our doing this, that they did not want to see the infrastructure needs being met, that they wanted to see us just focused on debt and debt alone. We will share that widely, Mr. Speaker, based on those observations and the opportunity to do this on a onetime basis.

I would now call the question, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 43 read a second time]

Bill 44 Insurance Statutes Amendment Act, 1999

[Adjourned debate November 23: Mr. Havelock]

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to add my comments on Bill 44, the Insurance Statutes Amendment Act, 1999, to the debate that's occurred so far.

First of all, I would like to get a question answered in terms of part of this bill. These are the sections under part (5). If I could have that clarified in terms of the principle behind what the government is intending with this section, the provisions that constitute an offence, to include those sections under part (5) of the insurance

contracts which include: failure to furnish to the insured a copy of the insurance application or proposal for insurance and the insurance policy of insurance and the insurance of variable life insurance policies, approval or revoking by the superintendent of an application policy in the endorsement or the renewal. I would like to know why this is being brought in with this particular part of the bill. This appears to be more of a housekeeping concern. What I think the essence of this bill really deals with is the issue of heterosexual common-law relationships, including that within the scope of the Insurance Act. So if I could get those questions answered. Why in principle is that particular portion included here?

Also, I'd like to speak for a moment about section 16(b), that is being amended by this act. To me this doesn't seem quite as housekeeping in nature. In fact, it seems to me that this may be establishing a precedent that follows through in other areas of debate, particularly I'm thinking in terms of private health care. I'm wondering why section 16(b) is being amended here so that cabinet may now make regulations "prescribing classes of individuals" for the purposes of the interpretive provisions set out in sections 1 through 12.

It looks like this only involves the use of the regulatory power in prescribing definitions of insurance agents as persons who can enroll individuals and prescribe contracts of group insurance, according to all the subsections that are listed here. I think that in some original comments I read, we heard that this regulation power only applies to those interpretation clauses that reference the word "prescribed" in those sections. This appears to me to be a significant enhancement of the regulatory power, Mr. Speaker.

When we talk in section 16(b) about taking out "the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations . . . prescribing classes of individuals for the purposes of section 7," what does that really mean? To me it looks like this is establishing a step where we're taking power away from the Lieutenant Governor in Council, that may also be very useful in terms of this government's intent to expand private health care insurance through the delisting of insurance services and this government's move to privatize public health care in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, if you take a look at the section that talks about taking away power from the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the principle that this speaks to, the precedent that this starts to establish in terms of taking away that power and setting up precedents in other areas of legislation to me is very disconcerting. I'm hoping that in the near future we will get some definition of that and an explanation that is quite understandable.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal with what I think is the most substantive part of this bill. This bill, that is talking about now applying common-law spouse relationships in accordance with the Supreme Court ruling earlier this year, really has some huge deficits in it from our perspective and is not supportable in its current form. Certainly this bill as it stands doesn't recognize the variety of mutually supportive living arrangements chosen by Albertans. We've had this discussion in this Legislature several times before on several other bills. It's interesting to note that this government is still not prepared to address issues that have been determined by the Supreme Court of Canada, issues that would make their job as a government easier, I would put forward to them, and certainly cheaper in many instances.

We as the Official Opposition have in the past presented a proposal that would ensure that all Albertans are treated equally under the Insurance Act and would avoid further section 15 challenges. Now, maybe this government doesn't care about how much money they spend on court challenges and legal proceedings and maybe they don't care about how many people's rights they trample in the process of doing that, but we do, and we believe that the

majority of Albertans also care. So when we speak about this kind of a bill, this kind of an amendment being brought in, we expect performance from this government. We expect that this government will do everything in its power to eliminate the possibility of further section 15 challenges.

We have to ask ourselves once again why the government would even go there when they have a bill in front of them where they have the opportunity to do the right thing, to ensure that all mutually supportive living arrangements in Alberta are supported through legislation, to ensure that they're not going to be before the courts again on section 15 challenges. We would expect them to do that, but they don't. The question is: why don't they do it?

4:20

I think the answer to that question is very interesting. It leads me back to the days when we had bullies in the schoolyard, and I think this is bully-in-the-schoolyard behaviour. This government doesn't like to be called to account by anybody. That includes the Supreme Court of Canada, that includes the Official Opposition, and that includes people who don't fit their prescribed mode in terms of living arrangements. If you think back to your schoolyard days, Mr. Speaker, what did those bullies in the schoolyard do when they were called to account? They grudgingly listened and complied in the narrowest sense of the compliance requirement and certainly in the narrowest sense of the law, if that was where the position went to. Certainly they tried their best to get even at some future date: there was an elbow in the hallway or "get you after school" or whatever the case may be. They tried to get even at some point in time.

I think that that's the mind-set that this government has when we talk about these kinds of provisions that need to be brought forward. This government was forced to address issues of alternate lifestyle arrangements in this Legislature, and they don't like doing that, Mr. Speaker. So now at every opportunity, every chance they get, they're going to make sure that when they have legislation before them, they're going to take the very narrowest possible focus they can conceivably get away with, and if they get called to account on that in the future in terms of court challenges, they're quite happy to go there. They really don't care how much of our money they spend on those kinds of issues, because they are the bully in the schoolyard and they're going to have it their way and nobody else's way, and that's the end of the story for them, regardless of what the cost is.

Mr. Speaker, I would say that they're putting a great number of people in jeopardy and at risk and making their lifestyles poorer by doing that. We're not just talking about gay couples in this legislation, although certainly they are included within the scope of what we are asking for here. We're talking about all people in this province who live in arrangements other than a husband-and-wife spousal arrangement. There are many, many different types of living arrangements in this province at this time, and this government has to be forward thinking, open, and accountable enough to the people that they are willing to accommodate all possible kinds of arrangements. This legislation won't just affect common-law relationships, as is outlined here. It will affect other people who have spent their lifetime together, who would be hurt by not being included in this legislation.

I'm thinking of lots of kinds of lifestyle arrangements that you'd see in your own constituency, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we have over the course of time often seen brothers living together throughout their lifetime. We've seen sisters living together, brothers and sisters living together. We've seen aging parents with one of their children living together throughout their lifetime. We're seeing people who have disabilities for some reason living with other family members or other close friends for a lifetime, not a six-month

or a one-year or a two-week commitment but a lifetime commitment. It's those kinds of situations in addition to homosexual couples that this legislation addresses and that need our support, and this government should show leadership in terms of providing it.

Of course, we know they're not going to go there, Mr. Speaker, and that's very unfortunate because they are hurting many people. More than the people they choose to hurt, they are hurting people who would benefit immensely by this legislation being revised to include all kinds of mutually supportive living arrangements.

In this Legislature we have heard many people get quite upset on both sides of the House, on the government side in terms of our even requesting this, and we've seen some uncalled-for remarks from them on occasion. We've seen heated remarks come from this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, because this is a very emotional situation and people often feel very strongly on one side of the argument or the other. But I would ask the government at this point in time to set aside their strong feelings and just deal with this in terms of the law of the issue. If they think there is even an outside chance that they're going to see section 15 challenges at some point in time because their legislation wasn't forward thinking enough, didn't accommodate decisions that have already been made by the Supreme Court of Canada in dealing with these kinds of issues, I would ask them to just take a look at it in terms of the law of the issue and see if they are not remiss in terms of the scope of this bill.

I would ask that when we bring forward our amendment to this legislation that would widen the scope of the bill to include all mutually supportive living arrangements, they would seriously consider supporting that amendment. If they're not prepared to support our amendment, Mr. Speaker, then I would ask the government to bring in their own amendment to increase the scope of this legislation. We would be happy to support that kind of an amendment, which would make this bill a much better bill not just for the people affected by it but for the downstream costs that we are certainly going to incur as this kind of legislation gets challenged again and again in the court system.

So with those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and look forward to seeing what kind of amendments come forward when we get into committee on this bill.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased this afternoon to rise and lend my thoughts on Bill 44, the Insurance Statutes Amendment Act, 1999. At the outset, just to summarize my understanding of the amendments proposed, they are primarily to incorporate common-law relationships as the government deems they exist in this province in 1999. It does not, however, on my reading of the amendments, include a definition that incorporates the broader realities of partnerships and relationships in Alberta in this current year and that have existed for some time.

Perhaps the most obvious omission on the part of this bill this afternoon is the fact that when we look at the rules that apply to us as members and how we define relationships or partnerships as members – I'd like to refer this afternoon to the *Members' Guide* for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Specifically, under the category Responsibilities of Members, we outline in section 60 the Declaration of Direct Associates and Conflicts of Interest. Under that section it is specified that "Members are required to file disclosures with the office of the Ethics Commissioner."

[The Speaker in the chair]

In addition to that, a member who, as the rules read, has a direct associate, as it is called in our guide – declarations must also be provided for a direct associate. Now, as we define the relationships in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, a direct associate may be

- a Member's spouse (but not where the spouse is living apart under a judicial separation or written separation agreement).
- A direct associate may also mean
- a corporation carrying on business or activities for profit or gain of which the Member is a director . . .
 - a corporation carrying on business for profit or gain in which the Member owns shares . . .
 - a partnership of no more than 20 partners of which the Member is a partner; or
 - a person or group of persons acting on behalf of the Member as agent if that agent is or becomes a party to a contract of which the Crown is also a party.

I think it's very interesting to note that in our own conflict of interest rules as they are summarized within our *Members' Guide*, there is an attempt made to try and include the broadest definition of relationships or partnerships that might bring the member into an area of conflict of interest.

4:30

Now, in the Insurance Act the government has chosen to restrict for our discussion today the common-law relationship as meaning only

- a relationship between 2 people of the opposite sex who although not legally married to each other
 - (i) have continuously cohabited in a marriage-like relationship . . .
 - or
 - (ii) if there is a child of the relationship by birth or adoption.

Further, it adds that a "spouse" may mean

- (i) a spouse of a married person, and
- (ii) a party to a common law relationship.

Why is there inconsistency, Mr. Speaker, between what we require as members sitting within the walls of this Chamber and what we require in relationships for purposes of the Insurance Act? I would think that we would want to have some consistency. Certainly members should be held to a higher standard, but at the same time they should not be held to a standard that cannot be applied in a reasonable fashion in the other statutes and regulations of the province. I don't understand. If we are prepared to recognize partnerships that might exist within the confines of this Chamber that wouldn't perhaps fit within the description of common law with members of the opposite sex, why can't that definition hold for the Insurance Act?

I think that at the root of this discussion is really our ability as legislators and as parliamentarians to acknowledge that there are a variety of different relationships that exist and to express our tolerance, understanding, and respect for those relationships in their chosen form. This bill does not do that. It does not do that even though the province is alive to and mindful that the courts have been engaged in the issue and have given some direction about how the governors of the land should respond. That, I believe, has already been mentioned in the record, the Miron versus Trudel ruling, that stipulated that marital status is a grounds of discrimination under section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I don't need to restate that for the record. I am confident that this government is alive to that decision.

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we find ourselves this afternoon in a position where the government is not expressing that reality or respecting that reality in this piece of legislation. Now, that doesn't surprise me to any great degree, because I haven't seen a lot of tolerance expressed in this Legislature: tolerance for minorities, tolerance for the victimized, tolerance for members of the opposite

sex if that member of the opposite sex happens to be a woman. I've heard more inflammatory and insulting types of remarks made when the remarks have been directed towards a member of the feminine gender. I recite these realities because it magnifies to me that we do not in this Chamber live and respect each other in the relationships that we may have, not only as politicians but as people, as parents, as partners, as husbands and wives, as professionals.

I can't say on the record that the Chamber is an exception. I think that that reality exists in other sectors. It certainly exists in relationships in the employer and employee sectors. But, really, who sets the bar in the province about tolerance and understanding? Who creates the definitions of what relationships are acceptable? Would it not be, I would submit, this Chamber? If not this Chamber then perhaps the court and the laws of the land, and in that case I think that the court and the laws of the land in this respect have made it clear that we need to encompass a broader definition. Yet this afternoon, because of the blinders this government has chosen to apply to themselves with respect to this issue, we are forced to debate a bill that does not respect the reality.

You know, I would submit also, respectfully, for the record that the fact of the matter is that over 50 percent of the traditional relationships in this province, the relationships which the government only chooses to acknowledge, over 50 percent of those are ending in divorce. Now, I would like to see the statistics on the other types of relationships that exist that have not had incidence of breakdown, that have not had incidence of domestic violence or abuse.

We are not in a good state of affairs to be hanging our respective judgments and values, Mr. Speaker, on what might be defined by this government as a traditional relationship, because as difficult and as sad a statement as it is, traditional relationships in this province are not in good shape. If we have 50 percent of them ending in divorce and an unknown number of children being subjected to that breakdown and that reality in their lives, surely as legislators, in the amendments and the legislation that we propose, we should be able to respect that there is a mosaic of relationships that exists not only in this province but across the land, and we should make our legislation to fit accordingly.

I don't understand what the barrier is this afternoon that prevents this government from doing that. I really don't. I haven't heard the sponsor of the bill indicate why that is the case. I haven't heard a lot of government members speak to why that is the case. The fact of the matter is that hard-earned taxpayers' dollars could very well yet again be spent by the government defending its position, defending its blinded position in court, when the court has already established its jurisdiction in ruling on this matter. It is not, in my opinion, responsive or honourable governing to be put in that position this afternoon.

I also think – and it's been my experience in my short tenure in this Legislature – that there is something about this environment that tends to contribute to that blinding, if you will, or to a distorted perception about what constitutes a healthy relationship or a partnership. While perhaps it's not something that the members of government would acknowledge, they exist in an environment of power and influence, and after a long period of time, Mr. Speaker, perhaps 30 years, that can be a volatile environment to exist in, a volatile environment in which to make objective decisions.

When we see a government that has had the length of tenure in power that this government has had, I would submit that it obscures their perception of reality, and in that respect, even on, it could be said, so small an issue as what relationships exist and what relationships must be acknowledged in a statute governing insurance, the government of the day does not have the objectivity or the receptivity

to be able to say that this variety of relationships and partnerships exist and, therefore, must be incorporated in legislation.

4:40

I think it is a dangerous precedent that we set when we choose to create so narrow a definition. Other statutes, other applications could be taken from the positions embodied in this bill and applied in different circumstances. In essence, what we're saying this afternoon is that only a relationship that exists between members of the opposite sex and that has occurred in a span of time of three years, at least three years, or if that relationship has produced a child – only those will be incorporated into this legislation.

My colleagues have outlined a number of other types of partnerships and living relationships that Albertans exist in. Mr. Speaker, we've all lived those. We've all lived those. All of us have in our families different combinations of relationships, and that's not a new reality. That's not a new reality. So why bring forward a bill that is so narrow? Perhaps only to magnify the fact that we're afraid for some reason to acknowledge that these other realities exist: afraid for political reasons, afraid for religious reasons, afraid for some reasons of value or philosophy. But whoever said that being afraid was a good enough reason to not proceed with drafting the type of legislation that can be equitably and fairly applied to all citizens in this province? That is the question that for me this afternoon is not answered.

I cannot support this statute as it is currently written. I would respectfully submit that there should be other members of this Chamber, not solely those of the opposition, that should also oppose it in its current form. It lowers the bar. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it lowers the bar of what is acceptable. While I might in a humorous way say that the bar is already pretty low when it comes to statutory drafting and amending in this province, this is yet another notch, and I would certainly expect better. I would certainly call on the government this afternoon to do better. There are thousands of people out there whom you are elected to represent in this Chamber, and the amendments proposed in this Assembly today do not.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Insurance Statutes Amendment Act, 1999, sets out to accomplish one thing and one thing only, and that is to put into law a discrimination against men and women who choose to live in something other than what the government considers to be a marriagelike relationship. That does a disservice to the people of this province, that a government would propose such a bill.

I have tried to find a definition in law of this term "marriagelike relationship," and I've yet to be able to find that anywhere. In this House we've heard examples of members speaking about what their marriage means to them. Certainly anybody that is in this business of politics and does so with a partner at their side can well express the full range of emotions that transpire within a relationship, Mr. Speaker, as we engage in our chosen work. We tend to drag our significant others along with us.

There was a joke circulating around the caucus of the Official Opposition, Mr. Speaker, about the definition of "marriagelike relationship." I don't mean to be dismissive about the subject at hand, but the joke was that we must all be in marriagelike relationships if in fact we spend long hours together late into the night and there's no sex, and maybe that defines a marriagelike relationship.

AN HON. MEMBER: Do you want to explain that?

MR. SAPERS: One of the members opposite wants me to explain it, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I will.

The point is that this should not be about sex and sexuality. This should not be, as former Prime Minister Trudeau once said, about the business of the nation's bedrooms. This should be about doing the right thing for Albertans and the right thing for our constituents, who are human beings, for the men and women whom we serve.

Mr. Speaker, in an article entitled "In the Beginning," the writer John Hofsess wrote the following words.

In the world I believe in, and which may yet come to pass, male and female homosexuality is merely part of the human spectrum; not an all-consuming obsession, and certainly not "a way of life." It is a tactile means of expressing affection between special friends; it is a way of being vulnerable and honest with others of one's own sex; it is a latitude of love – it is not the universe.

That was written in 1980. Since then, of course, we've had the Charter, and we've had arguments before the highest courts of this country. We now get to Alberta in 1999, where it seems that those few simple words, that seem to make sense, that were published nearly 20 years ago, have been unread or unheard or unrecognized by the government of Alberta.

Insurance benefits going to people who have made a life commitment one to another should not depend on their sexual preference. All I can assume, Mr. Speaker, is that there is some notion of a different time. There's some notion in the minds of the government regarding the appropriate kind of sexual relationship or partnering that there should be, and for a government that has as its chief spokesman a Premier who went out of province to say that you should not infuse politics with morality – it seems to me that that's exactly what this government is doing.

So I say again: what's being feared? What changes in society are going to be wrought as a result of recognizing same-sex relationships? Will it be that there will be any lessening of domestic violence? Will it be that as a result of this amendment act limiting insurance benefits to same-sex relationships, the message will go out that we have rekindled the respect for human life and dignity to the extent that 150 women won't die in this country next year as a result of domestic violence? I don't think so. [interjection] What a stretch that is? Mr. Speaker, since today is the 10th anniversary of the Montreal massacre, it might be worth while to remind all members that it was a misogynist who opened fire on a number of women. He separated men from women in a public place and then executed, murdered the women simply because they were women.

I don't have any trouble seeing a bill which wants to reinforce stereotypes and reject reality as the same kind of a bill that creates the obsessions and the hatred and the distinctions in society that lead to those acts of violence. I don't have any problem making that connection, and I'm surprised that any member of this Chamber does.

4:50

In the last 10 years, Mr. Speaker, there have been about 1,500 women murdered as a result of so-called domestic, or family, violence. This bill talks about maintaining this view of the world in which relationships between men and women are the only kinds of relationships that merit legal sanction. I wonder again: what's behind this? What's the fear that motivates this? If you take a look at modern images, particularly of women, you notice that there is an increasing objectification of women. You don't have to look very far to see an advertisement that is sexually exploitive of women and, by default, of men as well. You don't have to open up many magazines or walk by many liquor stores or see many TV ads before you come to the conclusion that the sexual tension and the sexuality between men and women is not something that is held in particularly

high esteem by popular society. It's just seen as something to be exploited, something to be made fun of, something to be teased about but nothing necessarily to be revered.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wonder again: what's the fear behind this? Is it the fear that somehow we'll have to come to terms with this kind of exploitation and this kind of damage done to this human sensibility, or is it just something much more simple? Am I working too hard to try to figure out, to try to psychoanalyze, as it were, the motives of the government in bringing forward this bill? Am I working too hard? Is it something just far more simple and perhaps even far more crass? Is it the search for a vote-seeking political message that will appeal to a certain segment of the population, knowing full well that the legislation doesn't really have a hope in Hades of surviving a Charter challenge?

Maybe I've just been working way too hard trying to figure out what's going on in the minds of the government. Maybe it's as simple as this: there is a certain narrow-minded and, I will say, bigoted view of the world which suggests that there is only one kind of relationship and all the others aren't worthy. Some of those folks who hold that narrow-minded view are some of the same folks who have been saying to the government: "You're not conservative enough. We think you've become soft and moderate. We think that you are allowing decay in our society because of your permissive views." Maybe this government is just simply trying to shore up their political support with that minority of Albertans, and they can do so by introducing this bill.

Now, the troubling and cynical part is that the bill is introduced so those narrow-minded individuals can be appeased. The government can say: hey, look at us; we listened to you. Then the government will use its majority to force this bill through the House. It will become law, and lo and behold it will be that eastern-based Supreme Court of Canada, those unelected, unaccountable justices of the Supreme Court, in the language that we've heard so many times from this government and from some of their supporters, who will see the error of this law, see the conflict of this law, see the folly of this law, see that it's not in keeping with time in Canada in 1999, and will overturn this law because of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Then this government will have their scapegoat. They'll say, "We tried to do the right thing" – with a capital "R" – "But that Supreme Court of Canada; boy, I'll tell you." It will be another fight that they'll be able to trump up with the justices of the Supreme Court and say that somehow it's this cabal of these eastern intellectuals that are forcing the hand of the poor elected officials of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what troubles me most about this bill: the fact that it is just fundamentally at odds with my worldview and the worldview of so many of my constituents and, I would say, the majority of Albertans and Canadians or whether it is that it is this cynical piece of political manipulation that's being laid before the Chamber so that the government can earn those few political points which I just described. No matter which is at the heart of this bill and my distaste for it, it is equally unsupportable, and I look forward to the day in this province when we can proudly say that we've regained the leadership that this province once had in Canada when it comes to matters of human rights. Certainly Bill 44 is a giant step away from that day.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

THE SPEAKER: Would all members in favour of the motion put forward by the hon. Government House Leader please say aye.

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The motion is carried.

head: Government Bills and Orders
head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

THE CHAIRMAN: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 45
Appropriation (Supplementary
Supply) Act, 1999 (No. 2)

THE CHAIRMAN: We're asking if there are any comments or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Chairman, in fact I did have some questions with respect to Bill 45, the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act. I'm delighted that the Provincial Treasurer is here. I had occasion to attend a function in Calgary. It was a meeting of the institute of public administrators, and the minister of natural resources was there speaking at that function. One of the things he said that caused me some discomfort – and this is a paraphrase; I didn't see the printed text. When he was talking about the provincial budget for 2000-2001, he made the observation that we've already decided, "we" being cabinet, the entire funding. The only thing that hasn't already been committed is about \$60 million out of a \$17 billion budget. I wasn't the only one that gasped when the minister of natural resources made that observation.

5:00

I think the reason I'm so concerned is I look at what's been happening with persons with developmental disabilities, and we see the ongoing kinds of cuts – I'll speak to the Calgary region because that's the one I'm most familiar with – to services and programs in the Calgary region to these vulnerable Albertans. Then you start asking why is it that some items have been identified as important enough to seek additional funding, and then we have a host of other things that are not. I mean, we can find \$1.276 million for government services for registry information system changes and enhancements. We can certainly find money for information technology initiatives, \$2 million, but what I find curious is why we don't see something in here that's going to address the well-identified needs of persons with developmental disabilities.

We go through the list, and I suppose the idea of the farm income disaster program, FIDP, \$1.89 billion – I mean, we understand that, but you look at some of the other ones. It's a curious identification of need, because in the case of the PDD caseload the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness has certainly been to meetings in Calgary that I have been at. He's heard the reaction. He started off talking about there haven't been cuts, that we've in fact increased funding. But, I think, after he spent some time talking to the groups affected, the agencies that had to cut programs, people who have actually seen a reduction in services, he stopped talking that way.

We go through this business of saying that the report won't come out until the end of December, but the reality is that the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness knows very well right now and his entourage that accompanied him to those various meetings certainly identified what the need was, and the need was substantial.

I probably have a couple of colleagues who may want to add their comments to this as well at the committee stage, may want to develop some of these things. So what I may do is just sort of

quickly survey now, and when I sit down in probably 10 or 15 minutes or so, there will be others I know who will want to develop some of those issues in a little more detail.

One of the concerns we've got, Mr. Chairman, is the anticipated child welfare caseloads, the \$36.8 million for child and family services authorities. I have so many questions about how the quality of children in care of the province has been enhanced by the devolution and the designation of responsibility of the local boards, and I just have a concern. Are we going to run into the same situation with the child and family services authorities that we have with the PDD authorities?

The PDD authorities like Calgary, for example, came along and said: you know we need another X million dollars to be able to provide the level of services in this region. Then the PDD Provincial Board didn't think very much of that, maybe a little more tightly under the wing of the minister, so we ended up with this sort of situation we have with the locally appointed board, and then government doesn't respect their opinion, doesn't value their advice, spurns their advice in fact. And when the Calgary PDD board chairman resigns, it's not the Calgary board that applies for a new chairman; it's the PDD Provincial Board that runs the ad. So, you know, the economic need is real, but in some respects the need is obscured, obfuscated, by these filters or hazy film over top, the hazy film being all of these new boards being created.

I wonder if we don't lose some of the sense of responsibility. We saw additional money going into PDD boards, and then government said that it wasn't being well spent. Are we going to have that sort of problem with the additional child welfare caseloads? Some very serious questions about that.

The \$1 million for the Youth Criminal Justice Act, community-based programs for young offenders, I think would be generally recognized as positive.

Lots of concerns with the Minister of Learning appropriation. You know, we now have an announcement of yet another MLA task force, Mr. Chairman, to find out whether the school boards are really telling the truth or whether the school boards are accurately reflecting real need. We have another example there of a provincial government that doesn't trust local boards.

So how is it, Mr. Chairman, that government always talks about the most effective government is governance that's close to the people who are receiving the service, whether it's regional health authorities, school boards, child and family services authorities, persons with developmental disability boards, but when the advice comes in that we need more money to be able to meet our statutory mandate, you get the reaction from provincial governments saying: well, we're going to have another MLA task force look at it, because we're not sure we really trust properly elected school boards when they tell us what they need.

I find that a frustrating element of this whole problem around supplementary supply and getting it right. Then you have to say: "Why is it that the provincial government always seems to be reacting after the fact? Why can't we do a better job of planning these things?" Part of it, I think, endemic to the system that we have in Alberta, is the provincial government just doesn't trust local authorities and doesn't trust local boards. So it seems to me that that has the makings of we're going to continue to see more appropriation bills, more supplementary supply for bigger and bigger and bigger numbers. Now it's \$1.5 billion. My guess is next year it will be over \$2 billion for supplementary supply. Anyway, I'm concerned with the process that certainly hasn't been answered to the satisfaction of my constituents.

The \$322 million appropriation for the Ministry of Health and Wellness. The sterilization claims: I'd just make the observation

there that I am staggered at the amounts that have been paid by the provincial government in terms of not settlements but the litigation cost. We have law firms in the city of Calgary that have billed millions of dollars for work around sexual sterilization claims, and I think how much lighter it would have been on the taxpayer's pocket, on the taxpayer's sweat-soaked loonies, as our Provincial Treasurer likes to describe them, if this government had had the foresight, the flexibility, the creativity, the imagination, immediately after the Leilani Muir decision was rendered to sit down and come up with a form of settlement conference and work aggressively to come up with a means of resolving those claims instead of simply leaving those plaintiffs to bang heads with the province's lawyers in the civil courts. How many more empty courtrooms would have been available for other litigants anxious to have their day in court if we'd been able to deal with that further? I know we're dealing here with the amount after the fact, but, you know, one of our roles is to mark areas where spending has not been prudent, where in some cases spending has been unnecessarily increased by action or inaction on the part of our provincial government.

5:10

Mr. Chairman, the other thing we can't avoid dealing with is the spiraling phenomena, the notion of supplementary supply. I think I'd mentioned before in the House that the current Provincial Treasurer, who has become the king of supplementary supply, in 31 months has dealt with unbudgeted spending of \$2.894 billion. Contrast that with the former Provincial Treasurer with \$611.257 million during four years as Provincial Treasurer. We can only project what the current Provincial Treasurer will be able to achieve in a four-year tenure, if he holds office for that length of time.

Those are all concerns that I have. You know, my constituents ask every time I put something in a community newsletter – you typically get some questions, and some people phoning and wanting to know what we're up to up here in Edmonton. When you get talking about supplementary supply, people have a lot of difficulty understanding why there is such a huge amount in supplementary supply, and almost invariably they raise questions about the inability of the province to plan, to project, to manage. It is interesting that as a government that likes to tout itself in national periodicals as a champion of the private sector, they'd have done such a poor job emulating some of the forecasting that's fairly characteristic of the private sector.

Those are some of the observations I wanted to make. I know that the Provincial Treasurer will suggest that this is something he has no control over, but I think we see a pattern emerging. He may be proud of the title king of supplementary supply, but I think many of us are very worried about it. It's a vexing claim, and I just think that's a concern that we're all going to be watching very carefully in the future.

It's good that there will be some additional funding available for areas that desperately need it, but we've got to be able to do something. Hopefully we're not going to see in 2000 this same kind of reliance on supplementary supply. Maybe, Mr. Chairman, this would be a reason to look at a better process for budget scrutiny so, in fact, more tough questions can be put to the Provincial Treasurer when it really counts, when the budget is being prepared. Maybe it's time to go back to something that Laurence Decore used to champion or what the province of Ontario has done, where they have a committee of the Legislative Assembly, an all-party committee, I might add, that is actually involved in the budget process fully eight months or nine months before the budget actually comes into the Ontario Legislature. Now, wouldn't that be a radical proposition?

Maybe, just maybe, with the help of some of the keen minds on

the opposition side – I think of our current Treasury critic, some people with a great deal of ability, much better than mine. Some of my colleagues I think could improve enormously on the quality of forecasting that's done, and maybe we could just do a better job of budgeting. Now, wouldn't that be a treat? I'd like to nominate some of my colleagues to participate in that process. Let's look at that Ontario model and see what we can do with that.

Mr. Chairman, there may be others who have some comments they'd like to make as well, but those are the points that I wanted to make. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIRMAN: The hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. DAY: Just briefly on a couple of issues. I'd like to hear more of the comments and concerns in committee so that I could address a number of them all together.

There's a constant reference from members opposite to cuts to the program for persons with developmental disabilities. There have been no cuts to that program. As a matter of fact, there's been an increase in funding. The fact is that this year especially there's been some very aggressive and appropriate movement to community agencies in terms of programs that they deliver to persons with developmental disabilities.

That combined with some of the demographic realities of people who literally survive disabilities incurred either at birth or through trauma, accidents, later on, with that growing population, with the move to community agencies on a regional basis as we began to move into this budget year – it was determined that with so many more people in line for programs, in fact, the existing budget, which was an increase from the previous year, appeared not to be sufficient. That's why that was addressed. It was addressed to the tune of millions of dollars.

Not only that, but the minister responsible has the associate minister doing a review. So not only was there an increase in dollars to the PDD programs, not only was there an increase, but there is further research going on to see how much more should in fact be done. So I do wish that the Member for Calgary-Buffalo would not frighten people by using language which is, in fact, not correct.

Also, he made an observation that there was an allotment of \$1.89 billion to agriculture. It's actually – and it's quite clearly written there – \$189 million. Maybe he just looked too quickly. It was probably just a mistake. We do value agriculture, but we did not bump it up \$1.89 billion this quarter, I can assure you.

Mr. Chairman, given the hour, I move that we adjourn debate in committee right now and that we rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

MRS. LAING: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 45.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 5:19 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to 8 p.m.]

