

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, December 8, 1999 1:30 p.m.**

Date: 99/12/08

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray.

At Christmas, the season
Of giving and sharing,
Of living and loving
Remembering, caring –

Our thoughts bridge the space that
Would tend to divide us
Restoring the warmth of
Your presence beside us.

May all the sweet magic
Of Christmas conspire
To gladden your hearts
And fill every desire.

Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition on behalf of the Save Our Schools group. It states:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition 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 was signed by 261 Albertans from Edmonton, Boyle, Plamondon, Lac La Biche, and Fort McMurray.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table a petition signed by 415 Albertans from Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Barrhead, Thorsby, Vermilion, and Red Deer. This petition is 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.

In this short session, that represents a total of 7,810 signatures.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table another petition, signed by 335 Edmontonians. This is a petition supporting public and separate schools, and it reads in part:

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

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have an SOS petition, signed by 214 people in Edmonton and area. They say:

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

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table 449 names from all across this province saying:

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

That brings the total on the SOS petitions to date to 22,852 Albertans.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling five copies of a petition that was initiated by the West County Concerned Citizens committee. It's signed by over 900 of my constituents, and it expresses the frustration, the anxiety, and the anger with the failure of the justice system to provide remedy for the shooting death of 16-year-old Karman Willis.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday in the Legislature concerning the WCB 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.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, we have a very long list today.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. First, I'm pleased to table five copies of the 1998-99 report on victims of crime. Too often we forget to focus on victims in justice matters. This report notes that grants for victims' programs rose by \$245,000 in one year to a new high of \$948,719.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also tabling with the Assembly copies of a report by the Alberta Law Reform Institute upon a review of section 8 of the Fatal Accidents Act. I'm pleased to advise the Assembly that cabinet reviewed the levels of damages awarded under the Fatal Accidents Act in accordance with this report and that levels will be adjusted for inflation so that the \$40,000 awards become \$43,000 and the \$25,000 awards become \$27,000. It's a requirement under the Fatal Accidents Act that the review happen and that the review be reported to this House.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also pleased to table information relating to certain matters that have been part of public discussion about the nature of this House and its work. First of all, I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a document which outlines the number of minutes of debate on Bill 40 up to December 3, 1999, when notice of motion with respect to closure was introduced. It indicates that the second most amount of time on any bill this year was spent prior to that time.

An additional tabling, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of statistics dating back to 1971 relating to the use of closure in this House. The members opposite issued press releases indicating that this government has used closure more times than other governments. What they neglected to mention in doing so was that in earlier years the governments didn't have any or very few members of opposition in the House, and therefore closure wasn't requisite. But when there are more members of the opposition in the House, obviously, we need to take things through closure. It notes that the numbers have gone down.

The next tabling is an analysis of the average time per day devoted to various activities in the House, including debate on government bills, Oral Question Period, and other business, which included debates on estimates.

MRS. SOETAERT: Are you doing damage control?

MR. HANCOCK: No. This is good information, Mr. Speaker, because members opposite have been . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, please. The purpose of Tabling Returns and Reports is not for ministerial statements. Please proceed.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My next tabling shows that the number of hours of the House sitting has increased from 3.9 hours per day in 1992 to 5.99 hours per day this year.

My last tabling shows that 60 percent of the time devoted to question period is devoted to the opposition in each of the years 1999, 1998, 1997, clearly demonstrating that they have more than adequate time to bring up their concerns.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to table five copies of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board annual report for 1998-99.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Now, that's the way to do it.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table with the Assembly today copies of a letter to the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East responding to questions raised during supplementary estimates on Wednesday, December 1, 1999. The hon. member received a copy of this letter prior to its tabling.

MR. SMITH: I'm tabling five copies of the annual review of the Alberta Racing Corporation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table a letter written to the hon. MLA for Edmonton-Centre by the Alberta Medical Association rebutting the statements that she made in the House about physician billing numbers.

1:40

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to table the '98-99 annual report of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table five copies of the response from Albertans to a survey on effective representation. Copies will be made available to all members.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings. Firstly, a summary of amendments to Bill 40 that the Liberal opposition was not able to move last night.

Secondly, I have a letter from the Health Sciences Association indicating their disappointment at closure on Bill 40.

Thirdly, I have a bar graph that even the government members will be able to follow with interest on the reality of speaking time in the Legislative Assembly on the bills we've dealt with in the fall session.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I have copies of the groundbreaking Bill 5 introduced in the Ontario Legislature entitled An Act to amend certain statutes because of the Supreme Court of Canada Decision in *M. v. H.* This is the way to do it.

Thank you very much.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise with four tablings. The first two relate to correspondence that I have received from the hon. minister of human resources relative to the implementation and writing of AISH regulations and, secondly, the allocations and financial breakdown for the transfer of PDD programs to the department of health.

The third tabling is correspondence that I have written and sent to the hon. minister of health relating to the SPCA's assumption of disease control and public health responsibilities relative to the cleanup of the cat house in Parkallen in Edmonton-Riverview.

The final tabling is a document titled Raising the Floor: the Social and Economic Benefits of Minimum Wages in Canada, complete with an Alberta analysis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have only one tabling this afternoon, with your permission. It's five copies of an invitation to a Christmas luncheon put on by the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group which was held earlier today at the Kingsway Legion in Edmonton. It was well attended by about three dozen members of the group, at which point they collected toys for Santas Anonymous.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table copies of 250 letters from parents of Galbraith elementary school asking the Minister of Infrastructure to provide the funding that was promised initially in 1993 to upgrade the third floor of their school.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling. It's

from Dr. Paula Fayerman to the Premier. She is a family physician living and working in the Premier's riding and wants it known that "the solution is not to start private hospitals" but "improving the existing universal health care system."

Thank you.

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

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Just one tabling today, a letter from a nurse named Anita Volk to the minister of health with her critical analysis of Bill 40.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a copy of a letter sent to I believe it's the standing committee on human resources and employment. The letter was sent by the president of Operative Plasterers' and Cement Masons' International Association of the United States and Canada. Among several issues that the letter lists here, one has to do with changing the labour legislation so that

the ability of employers to permanently replace striking workers should be eliminated, as it has the effect of destroying the worker's rights to strike in support of other basic rights for all workers.

That is the first one.

The second one is copies of several letters in support of Bill 216, the Endangered Species and Habitats Protection Act, a bill that stands in my name on the Order Paper for this sitting, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a letter to the Calgary regional health authority from the Calgary Association of Parents and Professionals for Safe Alternatives in Childbirth, now called Birth Unlimited, expressing concerns about the undermining of professional standards of competency and practice for midwives, non contract renewal for the regional midwifery implementation co-ordinator, and a lack of representation of midwives on the committee.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission, I'd file five copies of a letter to the Minister of Learning from a junior high school student outlining the consequences of underfunding schools.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is from Aileen Pelzer, who still has some reservations about the proposed Natural Heritage Act.

The second is from Eva and Paul Sylvestre and Aileen Pelzer, who are registering their concerns about the planned four-season resort in the Spray Valley in Kananaskis in the middle of a large and important wildlife corridor.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two tablings this afternoon. The first one is by an Alberta injured worker, and in it he outlines how a WCB employee withheld

pertinent information on a case and how that employee also provided erroneous information to the board.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is also by an Alberta injured worker, and it indicates the frustration of an injured worker when no medical evidence or diagnosis was accepted by the WCB as of November 24, 1999. This injured worker has been through four years of frustration and at a cost of \$117,000 to the WCB concerning his claim.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a report which outlines discrepancies between the interpretation and implementation of WCB policies from case to case and also from case manager to case manager.

The second tabling is a copy of a letter to the Premier from the Disenfranchised Widows Action Group urging a speedy resolution to the ongoing question they have with the present Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Learning I would like to introduce to you and through you today the Alberta skills competition team, that just recently represented our province at the World Skills Competition in Montreal just a month ago. The candidates here today are Jason Stoppler, Ryan Pomedli, Henri LaChance, David Warkentin, Perry Sipos, Jordan Hindbo, and Robert Waite. I might mention that Robert was the winner of a bronze medal, and we're talking about a world competition here, so our congratulations to Robert. Also with them are their trainers Volker Koesling, Darren Meidahl, Ken Waite, Manfred Schuerkamp, Stephen McIntosh, Malcolm Haines, Bill Lapointe and our international experts John Horne and Eric Schmidt. Now, they're joined by members of the board of Alberta skills competition. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly students, teachers, and parents from the Caraway society in Strathearn school in the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency. Caraway is a program of choice within the Edmonton public school system, and today we have bright and energetic grades 5 and 6 students from the program here. They are ably led by their teacher, Vivian Bell, and program aide Lance Paul. They are accompanied by parent volunteers Heather Pick; Colleen Hefernon, who as well as being an active parent in the school is also a noted children's author; Sylvie Ponce Gauthier; and Barb Tilley. They're in the public gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:50

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to members of this

Assembly 29 students from Sir Alexander Mackenzie school, a school we affectionately call SAM. It is, of course, situated in St. Albert. They are accompanied by two of their teachers, Mr. Pat Collins and Mr. Roger Bouthillier. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

MR. SHARIFF: Mr. Speaker, I have great pleasure in introducing to you and through you to members of this Assembly members of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee seated in the members' gallery. For the fiscal year '98-99 they visited 251 facilities in Alberta, met with 1,277 clients, and talked to 566 staff members and service providers. As I introduce them, I request that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Carol Brown from Pincher Creek, Nancy Donnelly from Cold Lake, Delina James from Calgary, Gordon Lowe from Calgary, Thomas Lukaszuk from Edmonton, Jane McNamara from Calgary, Mickey McMaster from Red Deer, Yvonne Slemko from Onoway, Jean Wilkinson from Edmonton, and Edith Zawadiuk from Two Hills.

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

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I tabled five copies of the report on victims of crime. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three of the four members of the Victims of Crime Programs Committee. The committee members in attendance in the House today are Sergeant Mona Jorgensen from the Calgary city police, representing the Police Service; Diane Wickenheiser from Hays, Alberta – I might mention that Hays is in the riding of Little Bow, which is so ably represented by our colleague – who serves as a member at large; and Mr. Peter Teasdale from Alberta Justice. These members of the Victims of Crime Programs Committee are seated in the members' gallery. They do great work for Albertans. I request that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you Dr. Paul Cappon, RD, director general of the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada. I would ask Dr. Cappon to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Health Information Act

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last night this government used brute force to silence legitimate debate in this Legislature on the fundamental privacy rights of 3 million Albertans. Over the clear objections of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Medical Association, the College of Family Physicians, the city of Edmonton, and thousands of Albertans this government has proven it is drunk with its own power. My questions are to the Premier. Is this a taste of the tactics that Albertans can expect when his two-tiered health care bill comes into this Legislature in the spring?

MR. KLEIN: First of all, Mr. Speaker, there's no two-tiered health care bill unless the hon. member brings the bill in. The only party

advocating two-tiered health care is the Liberal opposition. I'm going to quote from a radio script. Asked for her opinion on for-profit, American-style hospitals, the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition said: just let them set up; why does the government need to set it up for them; the private sector can set up in this province if they want; if it can find its place, it should get in there. Her words, Mr. Speaker, from the *Rutherford Show*, October 20, 1998.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why did this Premier ignore the legitimate concerns expressed in every corner of this province to this flawed legislation?

MR. KLEIN: The legislation is not flawed, and as the leader of the Liberal opposition named some people opposed to it, there are many people in support. I'm going to read a letter from Paul Greenwood. [interjections] Why are they laughing? Mr. Speaker, I can't understand why they're laughing. Do they think that Paul Greenwood is a fool? He's a well-respected doctor who was very, very significantly associated with the Alberta Medical Association. He says:

I am writing to you to express my support for the new Health Information Act and to state publicly that I am not in agreement with the opposition and the stand taken by the Alberta Medical Association. As you are aware, I have been a member of the Legislative Committee which has been responsible for drawing up the initial principles upon which the act was based and the review of the drafting of the legislation. This committee was formed after the Bill C30 was proposed and took this bill as . . . [a strong] starting point. We received input from a large variety of sources and this included the Canadian Medical Association, and many other professional organizations. We also studied legislation existing both in Canada and in other jurisdictions and are well aware of the variety of standards which exist both within this country and in North America as well as in the European economic community.

Mr. Speaker, the letter goes on and on in support of Bill 40. Since I've referred to the letter, I would like to table five copies.

Thank you.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Dr. Fayerman in Calgary-Elbow didn't agree. We tabled the letter today.

Why has the Premier created a special exemption for private health care companies that are poised to enter Alberta when it comes to private, confidential patient information?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is a question that speaks to the detail of the legislation. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is my view that this is the hon. leader's creative interpretation of I think a very sound bill which provides additional, very significant protection of information in this province.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On 25 occasions since they took power, the Klein administration has choked off debate in this Assembly. This government has a record of ignoring the public interest and ignoring what the public wants and ramming through legislation. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier admit that he's not at all interested in protecting private health information because he wants to facilitate contracting out to private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is quite a stretch, to equate Bill 40 to the policy statement that has been released prior to the introduction of legislation next spring on health care reform. That is a real stretch. This bill, Bill 40, has absolutely nothing to do with the legislation that we're proposing to introduce.

Mr. Speaker, what really galls me is that this hon. member was not only a cabinet minister but a member of agenda and priorities and, I believe, a member of Treasury Board. She was a very, very powerful minister in the Getty government. When closure was used 14 times during her tenure as a very senior cabinet member, I never heard her make a peep. Not once.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the health care system was in fine shape in '92, and it's a mess in '99.

Mr. Speaker, at present there needs to be a reason for confidential patient information to be released. The question is: why is this government now allowing anyone in the Department of Health and Wellness to access medical records in a physician's office?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, that speaks to the detail of the bill, and I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the things that is being ignored, perhaps conveniently, by the opposition is that when this three-year-long consultative process began and to this point in time, we do not have legislation in this province which deals with the protection and proper, authorized release of information related to physicians' offices. This legislation is designed to provide for that process, provide for the protection of individual information in the most appropriate way. That is the whole purpose of this particular legislation.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why is this Premier bringing in two-tiered privacy: one level for the wealthy, who can buy it, for private facilities, and another level for the rest of us, who rely upon public health care?

MR. KLEIN: You know, I have no idea what the hon. member is talking about. She's talking about two-tiered. She is the only one, by the way. The hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is the only person talking about a two-tiered system and the only one actually supporting a two-tiered, parallel system, and she's quoted as saying that she supports such a system. Mr. Speaker, I just read the quote from the radio show. Now, she's talking about two-tiered privacy. I have no idea what she's talking about.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm having as much difficulty listening to the answers as I am having difficulty listening to the questions, so let's try it again.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, we'll see if the Premier can figure this one out: an example of how this government treats private information belonging to Albertans. An information and privacy branch officer wrote two weeks ago and admits that the government released personal information that was not properly severed from the records. My question is to the Premier. Is this the sort of confidentiality that Albertans can expect when it comes to their personal medical records?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, if the leader of the Liberal opposition is alluding to health information, this is a matter that remains within the department of health, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to note that in the legislation, Bill 40, there is the reference of a number of issues to the judgment and to the review and decision of the Privacy Commissioner. One of the amendments that was made in the Assembly – and there were a number of amendments made to that bill to improve it – came from the opposition across the way. It was to add to the references and the protection that can be provided by the commissioner's office to the report or the information from an ethics committee that would be making a judgment on the use of information with respect to research. So in terms of there being respect for and use of the office of the Privacy Commissioner, that is certainly something that is very much featured in Bill 40.

With respect to the particular case that is being quoted, Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of this particular case.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, two days ago that same Privacy Commissioner found that the government had disclosed the complainant's personal information to a third party in violation of the FOIP Act, so can Albertans expect that their sensitive health information is going to be handled in the same negligent manner by this government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this speaks to the question of fairness. I don't know the details of this particular case. I don't know to which department the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition refers.

Mr. Speaker, I'm receiving a signal from one of the hon. ministers, a member of Executive Council, that it might have something to do with his department. I'll have him respond.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, to supplement. I believe the situation that's being talked about here today governs a situation that happened within my jurisdiction in Human Resources and Employment. There was an order written by one of the privacy officers with recommendations. We have accepted those recommendations, and as we are speaking here today, we are reviewing what we can do to make sure that this doesn't happen again.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given these breaches of personal privacy, why should Albertans have anything but anxiety when it comes to incompetence in handling personal health data under the government's new law?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, no anxiety. The only anxiety being created is that being created by the Liberal opposition through misinformation, through fear mongering. This bill speaks to the protection of public health information. It speaks to the protection of any information. It speaks to the information of any member of the Liberal opposition's private health information, any member of this caucus, citizens throughout this province. That's what Bill 40 speaks to. It speaks to the protection of that very, very important personal health information. That's what it speaks to.

Private Health Services

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, what this government is poised to do is usher in legalized for-profit hospitals, that would be entitled to suck money out of taxpayers' pockets and put that money into the bank accounts of a few profiteers. That is what's coming in the spring. I don't understand, so maybe the Premier will explain why he and his government are threatening the integrity and future of our public health care system when we have everyday experience, every study, and common sense saying that public health care is cheaper, more effective, and fairer.

MR. KLEIN: Well, you know, every Premier in this country and the hon. federal Minister of Health say that the system as we know it now is not sustainable and that the status quo is simply not acceptable and there must be changes.

Mr. Speaker, what we are trying to do is alleviate suffering by shortening the time for certain surgical procedures, but we want to make sure that it's done on a cost-benefit basis and that it makes sense. That's what it's all about.

MS BARRETT: No other Premier is contemplating what this government is doing, so why is the Premier so afraid to take this matter to the people and let them judge through a referendum? What's he afraid of? That he can't win?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've answered this question numerous times. Quite simply, why would we take to the people a referendum on upholding the wonderful principles of the Canada Health Act? Why would we do that?

MS BARRETT: You need a new spin doctor.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Premier why it is that he hasn't tabled every single written correspondence that his office has received over this dangerous course that he's about to embark on? Why doesn't he do it?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, I don't know how many letters and phone calls and pieces of correspondence, e-mail, and so on we've received on this particular issue. I can tell you that if I were to table every piece of correspondence that comes into my office on this matter or any other matter, none of us would live long enough to see the end of the tablings.

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

Workers' Compensation Board

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment responsible for the WCB. Recent newspaper reports about the Alberta WCB reveal that case managers have been pressured by their supervisors to deny claims or reduce payouts to injured workers in order to save money. These allegations made a lot of people very nervous and very skeptical of the WCB activities. What can the minister tell my constituents about the authenticity and reliability of these reports, and what is the government policy in view of these allegations?

2:10

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is relaying information to the House that many of us as MLAs have certainly heard. I don't think there's a person here in this Assembly and perhaps even in the province that doesn't understand that the Alberta workers' compensation system leads this nation in terms of its ability to provide for injured workers and to provide for employers in this particular province. As a matter of fact, of course, it's a model for the rest of the country. So I don't know that there's any concern that we need to have here today about the particular legislation that governs the Workers' Compensation Board here in this province or the policies that have been dictated by the board of directors.

What the member is referring to, I believe, is: are the procedures being followed, and are those procedures in line with the policy? That's the very reason that the board of directors of the Workers' Compensation Board have agreed to add a service review stream to the overall consultation process that they have under way. It's an

excellent opportunity now for Albertans, for MLAs, for any stakeholder that has knowledge of such items to carry that forward now to that particular stream, because we're hearing at this particular point the questions from a government member. He has a choice: he can take those situations directly to WCB if he wishes, or of course he can come to the committee that is being chaired by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South and provide the input at that particular time.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister assure my constituents and all Albertans that the board is not looking for ways to save money by minimizing the income support payments that injured workers receive and by reducing their permanent disability awards?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think we can make that assurance, Mr. Speaker. When we look at the numbers of the particular cases, we're finding that an overwhelming number of injured workers are being dealt with, I believe, as the policy and as the legislation would provide. If my numbers are correct, I believe there's something in the order of 2 percent or 2.3 percent of the claims that are denied. I have no idea as to whether or not this is in line with other insurance systems that we would have throughout this country, but I would just expect the hon. member to know and to understand that there won't be an insurance system in the world that would have a hundred percent of its claims accepted.

Again, I offer the opportunity for the hon. member to provide input directly to WCB, or in this case, because he is a government member, he can use the ability that we've set up with the government MLA input committee.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister again assure Albertans and, in particular, the injured workers that claims are assessed based on medical reports and not on the case manager's opinion of the worker?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, these are certainly good questions. Again, Mr. Speaker, I would want to try to make it as clear as I could that the role of the government of Alberta is to make sure that we have legislation in place and to make sure that that legislation is adhered to by the Workers' Compensation Board. So there is a responsibility on the part of the board of directors of the Workers' Compensation Board to ensure exactly what the hon. member is questioning.

I don't believe there's anyone here in this Assembly and I don't believe there's anyone in Alberta that wants to see a return to the old system of WCB, where there was direct political involvement in specific files. Again, he has the opportunity, as does any member in this House – every member in this House, based on their experiences with the Workers' Compensation Board, has an opportunity now to go and talk directly to WCB about the service that either their constituents or people that they're aware of have been receiving. Any MLA here in this room today can also come to see the government input committee as well. It's open to all of us here today.

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

Confidentiality of Health Records

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only way this Premier's private hospitals can make a go of it in two-tiered Alberta will be by controlling costs and using co-payments. We fully expect that this government will allow the Premier's private hospitals to use

non-union nurses. Health service providers know that labour is a major cost, and they will certainly want to control it. The other major cost of the Premier's private hospitals and the need to control it will be of information uncertainty and potential legal costs. All my questions this afternoon are to the Premier. As contractors with health information custodians, will private hospitals have access to the government's health information data base so that they can screen patients and avoid the cash flow uncertainty that comes from treating high-risk and high-cost patients? Explain that, please.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we're not talking about private hospitals. We're talking about the extension of clinics, that already exist and already contract to regional health authorities. We're talking about eye clinics that do cataract surgery. We're talking about abortion clinics. Now we're talking about clinics being established to accommodate overnight stays for some of the kinds of procedures that are putting tremendous pressure on the system.

Mr. Speaker, I'd simply point out that the proposal states that before a contract can be let, it has to be proven that there are going to be cost benefits, that there are going to be efficiencies, that it's going to serve to shorten waiting lists, and that it's going to serve to ease suffering.

Relative to whether the doctors use union staff or non-union staff, it's entirely up to them.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. When a patient goes to a private hospital, will all his or her health information, collected at a great deal of public expense, like blood work, physical results, x-rays, diagnostic scans, be transferred to the private hospital free of charge so that the private hospital doesn't have to repeat these tests and incur those costs? Will this be one of the ways that they are further subsidized by Alberta tax dollars?

MR. KLEIN: You know, Mr. Speaker, maybe this hon. member is so healthy that he's never been to a doctor or for his annual checkup. I'm going to take him through what happened to me. I went for my annual checkup. I went to my doctor who gave me a requisition form. I went to the Allin diagnostic laboratory, a privately operated laboratory. Right? I could have gone to the Hys Centre. I could have gone to any number of laboratories. I had all my blood work done, had urine samples done, x-rays, you know, a cardiogram. I mean, I had all that stuff, and it was done at the Allin laboratory. It's down here on - what? - 122nd Street and about 103rd Avenue or 102nd Avenue. When I went in, it was a privately operated clinic, and the people working there were not working for free. They were working to make money, believe it or not.

Now, is this hon. member about to say in this House that he wants to see the Allin Clinic shut down? That's what he's suggesting.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, and I'm not interested in the personal health information of the Premier. I'm interested in getting answers for Albertans.

Given that there are no administrative penalties that apply to private hospitals for the misuse of personal health information transmitted from the Premier's central computers, will Albertans or the government be able to sue the private contractor if and when that information is sold or otherwise misused?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this has absolutely nothing to do with the proposal that we're putting forward to bring in legislation relative to health reform. All I can say is what I've said in the past: whether it's a private clinic, whether it's a hospital, the only card you need is your public health care card. That's the only card.

Now, relative to the specifics of the member's question, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I would just briefly draw to the attention of the hon. member that one of the provisions in the legislation, in Bill 40, is that of a penalty for the misuse of information and the violation of the act. It has been raised from what is currently the case under the privacy codes of the province, I think about \$10,000, to \$50,000. So it's a very substantial penalty, and that provision is in the bill.

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

Student Discipline

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Discipline in schools should mean a clear set of well-defined behaviours and expectations for all children. This should include a code of conduct and even an educational contract that makes schools work. Consequences should be fair, immediate, and consistent. Parents should be advised of disciplinary measures, that are plainly spelled out in a student handbook, at the beginning of the school year. My questions are all to the Minister of Learning. Would the minister consider establishing a policy that all students and parents sign a letter of commitment that all conditions of enrollment in a school must be followed?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that excellent, excellent question. Obviously discipline is a very important aspect of our schools and a very important element of our school policy. The issues that the hon. member raises about a so-called letter of commitment is actually being done in four or five school districts around Alberta, and it's difficult to say exactly if it is improving discipline. The hon. member was at the SPC last night, where we discussed the Alberta initiative for school improvement. There is certainly room under that improvement to put this in, and I would certainly encourage it. I would encourage the school boards to put something like this in and see if it actually scientifically does alter the disciplinary habits of the school system, if it does make kids follow discipline better. I think that would be absolutely fascinating to find out.

With regards to an actual school policy, Mr. Speaker, that is left up to the school boards. We'll see if it's a good idea. We'll see if it works, and if it does, then perhaps it's something that all school boards can consider.

MRS. FORSYTH: Would the minister consider establishing zero tolerance of harassment, whether it is verbal, sexual, or bullying?

DR. OBERG: First of all, Mr. Speaker, the majority of school boards in Alberta do have a zero-tolerance policy. When it comes to things such as bullying, when it comes to things such as verbal harassment, when it comes to things such as sexual harassment, the last one perhaps not as much, but when it does come to those things, we have to deal with the kids on an individual basis. The school boards do that. They deal with each individual constantly, and if they feel that the individual has gone against the code of conduct that that school has developed, then they will take measures against that child. The child then has the ability to appeal to me. I am confident that zero tolerance is the way to go, and I am confident that our school boards are actually enforcing zero tolerance to a very large degree around the province.

MRS. FORSYTH: Given that there are no statistics on violence

affecting schools, will you establish a directive that all violence in schools must be reported to your department in order to establish the areas in which there are problems and the severity of these problems?

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Referencing my last answer, keeping in mind that all of these incidents are very individual, that all of these incidents are very subjective, and that they all occur in different circumstances, we have asked through the Safe and Caring Schools initiative that all school jurisdictions voluntarily bring that information to us because quite frankly we need to see if there are pockets of areas where this is occurring. We need to see if there are direct actions that need be done in certain areas. We need to see if there are specifics related to certain incidents. For example, is bullying more of a problem in the north than in the south? Is sexual harassment? Things like this. This is what we need. To the hon. member: yes, we are doing that, and we will hopefully be compiling that information within the next four or five months as school boards bring it to us.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, followed by the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Health System Infrastructure

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In a December 1, 1999, letter from the minister of health to the MLA for Edmonton-Glenora the minister wrote:

There have been no studies conducted by or for either Alberta Health and Wellness or Alberta Infrastructure regarding the replacement cost of health infrastructure . . . [and] there have been no studies of patient capacity in the health care system.

My questions are to the minister of health. Why would this minister go along with a plan to dismantle medicare and pave the way for private hospitals when he doesn't know what the current capacity of the public health care system is?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would certainly acknowledge – and this was brought forth in the Auditor General's report – that we do work with the Department of Infrastructure with respect to deciding upon capital projects, renovations, meeting the overall structural needs of the facilities in our health care system. So we do need to improve our information with respect to inventory.

However, the issue with respect to our overall policy proposal with respect to the publicly funded, publicly administered health care system is focusing on the services to be provided. There are arrangements in the province, I'm sure, where voluntary service providers occupy leased space within regional health authorities buildings. There are also arrangements with respect to the private sector. So I assume that what's being implied in the question is that if you happen to have an empty room somewhere or a partially filled wing of a hospital somewhere, this automatically means that you shouldn't be considering the Good Samaritan Society setting up a long-term care centre or a private laboratory company contracting for laboratory services.

MS LEIBOVICI: No. What it means is that if you have excess capacity in beds in the public system, why are you contracting out in the private system?

When the minister writes that there have been no studies conducted regarding replacement costs of health infrastructure, is this an admission by the government that it no longer believes it is responsible for replacing public health facilities and that it's now the private sector's job to do so?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, we certainly do not have – and this is quite correct – a full, complete, and very detailed inventory of all the space that exists in the health care system. It is certainly something that we are working towards, and the hon. Minister of Infrastructure may want to comment on this because this is his particular area of responsibility.

2:30

However, the point, as I said before, is that we're looking at the benefits of service being improved – more rapid, more effective – through contracting with private operators of health care services in our policy statement. That contract would be administered through whatever is the most effective location for the particular project.

MS LEIBOVICI: Would the minister, then, explain how he makes his decision regarding contracting if he has no idea of capacity within the public health care system and no idea of the health infrastructure that's within the system right now? How do you decide where you're going to spend your \$5 billion annually for health care?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way I think has her priorities dramatically reversed. What we want to do is improve and look at alternatives with respect to developing a quality hospital medical service to Albertans. The point is that you do that in the most cost-effective, high-quality way. That's what this policy is focusing upon, not whether it is going to fill up a particular area of some hospital that may have a few vacant rooms.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Karman Willis Investigation

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the first light of dawn was occurring on Father's Day, June 20, near the village of Hythe, Alberta, shots were fired, and 16-year-old Karman Willis was killed. The grief experienced by the Willis family, by Karman's friends, and by the community is everlasting. As the days and the weeks passed, frustration and anger spread throughout the region, and regrettably today that anger and frustration continue to rise. My constituents simply want justice to prevail. All of my questions are to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Given that almost six months have passed since the shooting death of Karman Willis, why have no criminal charges been laid against those responsible for her tragic death?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, this was certainly a tragic incident, and our hearts and prayers continue to go out to the family, the parents, and the community. It is however an ongoing investigation, and therefore I must be very careful about how I comment.

I can say this generally about investigations. Investigations are totally within the purview of the police, in this case the RCMP. While I can't go into detail with respect to this particular situation, I can say on a general basis that when criminal actions are investigated, the police will investigate thoroughly, and when they are at a point where they have information which, if proven, would lead to the conviction of an individual responsible for the act, they will make recommendations about laying charges. In this situation we have not as yet reached that stage. The investigation is ongoing and will continue until they have either exhausted all possibilities or reached a successful conclusion and made recommendations with respect to charges.

MR. JACQUES: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the minister has indicated that he can't give specific details, can he at least ensure and assure us and give to us: what best resources and maximum resources are being used by the RCMP and by the Crown prosecutor in determining the course of their investigation?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, we have in Alberta some of the best police forces in the country and I think anywhere. Certainly we have a lot of faith in the RCMP in this particular case and their ability to ensure the safety of the community and of all residents in the community. We have ongoing discussions with the police force, in this case the RCMP, to ensure that they have the necessary resources at their disposal. They have significant resources at their disposal. If and when they need more resources, I'm sure that they will request assistance. That hasn't happened because they are satisfied that they have the resources necessary.

I'd also like to say, Mr. Speaker, generally speaking, that Albertans can be assured that this government will continue to take all steps necessary to ensure that our citizens, wherever they live, are safe in our communities.

MR. JACQUES: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, my final question is to the Minister of Justice. Is he willing to commit to a meeting with representatives of the West County Concerned Citizens committee at the earliest opportunity?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, everywhere I go and whenever I speak with people, I encourage people to be involved in justice in their communities in a positive and meaningful way and to look at ways that we can make our communities safer and things that we can do as citizens in our communities to make our communities safer. I certainly am prepared to meet with citizens wherever who are prepared to do positive things to build on the safety within their communities. I would indicate that in any such meeting, I cannot and will not deal with specifics of investigations or specifics of cases before the courts, but I'm always happy to go anywhere to meet with citizens to talk about how we can make our communities safer.

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

Municipal Police Costs

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a major crime happens in a small rural community here in Alberta, the cost of the investigation can eat up a significant portion of the community's policing budget. Small towns like Pincher Creek, High Prairie, and Cold Lake with populations of 2,500 and over must shoulder a large portion of the costs of the RCMP investigations. The disappearance of a local doctor in Fairview has apparently resulted in a bill of \$46,000 to the town of Fairview by the RCMP. Mr. Speaker, my first question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Given that an extensive RCMP investigation, like the one now being conducted in Fairview, can quickly swallow up an entire community's policing budget, where can a town such as Fairview go for relief to cover these costs?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, back in '94 the government reviewed all of the grants that were available to municipalities. At that time one of the grants that was available was a support for policing within the municipalities. At that time what was done was that rather than there being a directive as far as where the grants would be spent, all of the grants were put together in one large grant

and allowed for the municipality to use discretion as to how and where it used that grant. Part of that grant was for policing. Ultimately the money is still being forwarded to the municipalities. How the municipalities use that grant is their discretion, rather than the government providing directives as to how that money will be spent.

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, my second question is to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Has the government given any consideration to raising the population threshold from 2,500 to maybe 10,000 so that small communities in our province are not saddled with the cost of major RCMP investigations?

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start by indicating that the Member for Dunvegan has made a very good practice of attending in my office and dealing with the specific incidents that the member has just raised in the House because it is a concern for communities such as Fairview. I should make it perfectly clear that the costs that they have to bear in these types of investigations are the overtime costs, not the straight-line costs. Those are provided for under the normal policing budget. The overtime costs can still be very significant to a community.

In answer specifically to the questions that he's raised, I've indicated publicly that we will be reviewing the Police Act. In fact, we are now reviewing the standards. That's a concern certainly that's been raised by the AUMA and the AAMD and C, and we've indicated that in the course of our review we'll be certainly dealing with those questions.

MR. GIBBONS: My third question is again to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. Will the minister consider establishing a special relief fund to assist cash-strapped municipalities like Fairview to pay the cost of major RCMP investigations?

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to consider any worthwhile suggestion brought forward in the course of the process, and certainly that's a suggestion which could be considered. Of course one has to realize that whenever one sets up a fund or undertakes to pay costs – and we have no shortage of people coming forward and asking for payment of costs from various communities for various things. Whenever one does that, the money has to come from somewhere, so it's a question of priorities and where it comes from elsewhere in the Justice budget. But it's certainly a worthwhile suggestion, and we'll take it under consideration.

2:40

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

Handicapped Children's Services

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intensive therapeutic intervention program consists of conductive education, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech/language therapy, and child psychology. The program assists in the development of children with cerebral palsy and other similar motor disorders. My questions today are to the Minister of Children's Services. Could the minister outline for me what the qualifications are for participation in the ITI program?

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a very good question. In fact, the parents in the Renfrew school district in Calgary have asked themselves the same question.

Quite specifically, early applications for support under that

program were accepted by a child welfare appeal panel, although more recently the child welfare appeal panel has reviewed and found the program not fitting the definition of program and therapies for individuals that require intensive physiotherapy. Mr. Speaker, we are reviewing the program ourselves because the application of that program does not seem to fit any approved Canadian guideline. The request by parents for assistance in providing this type of intensive therapy is a fairly significant dollar cost, but more than that its results are unproven in Canada.

With my colleagues the Minister of Learning and the minister of health – we have agreed to ask for a review by a special panel of exactly what should be sponsored by this government. The health technology assessment committee of Alberta will actually answer our questions: is it safe, is it effective, and what client profile is it appropriate for? Simply put, the conductive education model in its present form may not be the program that we as a government can support. However, having said that, the PUF grant is currently supporting a number of children that are taking that program, cerebral palsy children, who have multiple and complex needs depending on their individual circumstances.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: why is it, then, that some children with these disorders qualify and others do not?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have asked that same question and have determined that the previous appeal panel was much more lenient to the regulations of the handicapped children's services program. We fund \$32 million for some 8,400 children and their parents who receive support for the programs, but it was never intended that that program fund the total of a program like conductive education.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: when can we expect the minister to come forth with a definitive policy so that all children have equal opportunity to access these programs?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I think that the assessment, as I understand it, will be in its early review sometime next March. I would expect that by June we will have some definitive answers. In the meantime our primary concern is the children of Alberta. Our primary concern is the welfare of these very special-needs children, and we will do whatever we can to assist the families within the existing programs to help sustain those programs during the process of the review.

Recognitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, 30 seconds from now I'll call on the first of seven members today to participate in recognitions.

International Year of Older Persons

MS KRYCZKA: Mr. Speaker, today I am very pleased to recognize the significant efforts and accomplishments of a splendid group of volunteers: the Alberta IYOP Advisory Committee. As 1999 and the International Year of Older Persons draws to a close, it is very fitting to recognize these eight Albertans who have actively promoted the theme Towards a Society of All Ages and the goals of IYOP throughout their regions and who have assisted community groups in staging over 4,000 events in Alberta, events recognizing contributions of our seniors that required many hundreds of hours of local volunteer time to plan and carry out.

Sincerest thanks to Diane Osberg of Priddis, the energetic chair of the Alberta IYOP advisory committee, and to committee members Ken Dickie, Pincher Creek; Ray Boyer, Grande Prairie; Tony Storcer, Calgary; Karen Klipperton, Sherwood Park; Ruth Iverson, Wainwright; Ed Gordon, Fort McMurray; and Ken Ing, Red Deer. You have all truly set a higher level of dedication and accomplishment for volunteers in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

Chinchaga Region Preservation

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many people in this province devote their spare time to helping protect our natural heritage. This may be as voluntary wardens of a natural area or working with one of the wildlife or environmental groups in the province. They all deserve our thanks and recognition. Today I would especially like to recognize the efforts of those in the Alberta Wilderness Association, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and the World Wildlife Fund for working to get protection for important areas of the province.

These groups, together with Albertans for a Wild Chinchaga and Peace Parkland naturalists, are trying to get an area of adequate size protected in the Chinchaga region. The special places local coordinating committee did their best but were subjected to great pressures to reduce the size of the area recommended for protection. These environmental groups have worked hard to raise public awareness of the importance of protecting this area. They hope the government is listening. I want to thank them for all their efforts.

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

Yes-to-Kids Program

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The greater Edmonton Community Foundation has initiated a wonderful program in cooperation with the United Way. Coincidentally, it is called Y to K. The translation for this program means Yes to Kids. The foundation is affording each person working in this century the opportunity to contribute to the welfare of children in the next century. The program works like this: if you donate the wages of your last formal hour of work in this century to a specifically established fund, your hourly wage, big or small, will help build a fund to serve the needs of children in the next century.

This, in my estimation, is a fine opportunity for everyone working on the bridge from this century to the next to contribute to a meaningful legacy to benefit the children of the next millennium. I applaud the creativity and farsightedness of the Edmonton Community Foundation.

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

Be True to Your School Program

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to recognize and congratulate two schools in my constituency: St. Francis Xavier, otherwise known as St. FX, and Belmead. These schools placed second and fourth respectively in the West Edmonton Mall Be True to Your School campaign.

Numerous schools participated in this contest, which coincided with the back-to-school shopping period. For every dollar spent at the mall, one point was scored for the school of their choice. The second-place winner, St. FX, was awarded \$7,500 and passes to the

new IMAX for the students and staff. This is the third time that this school has won. The fourth-place winner, Belmead school, received \$2,500 cash and is using the dollars for special activities for students, plus each teacher will receive \$100 to use in the classroom.

I would like to congratulate all on their participation in making this contest so successful and also West Edmonton Mall.

Thank you.

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

2:50 Pearce Estate Park Interpretive Wetland

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to recognize an outstanding partnership among the city of Calgary, the private corporation BP Amoco, the Alberta Environment department, and a community volunteer group in launching a project in the Calgary-Fort constituency. This project is known as Pearce Estates Park interpretive wetland. It'll be a showcase of aquatic habitat common to southern Alberta, including fish, plant, and animal species. This interpretive park will also serve as an environmental education exposure for our young and old.

The area is about 14 hectares next to the Sam Livingston fish hatchery on the Bow River. It preserves a natural area in the city, ensures public access, and is a living outdoor classroom. The park will enhance public knowledge about environmental protection and sustainable development, especially for schoolchildren. The interpretive park will be a landmark and potentially a tourist attraction in Calgary. I would like to commend the mayor of Calgary, the Minister of Alberta Environment, the president of BP Amoco, and Glen Matich and the staff of the Sam Livingston Hatchery and the volunteers on an excellent project.

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

Felice Young

MS BARRETT: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to recognize one of the executive staff of the Alberta Federation of Labour who'll be leaving her post at the federation after some 25 years of dedicated service to Alberta workers in pursuing attainment of equitable conditions for all workers in Alberta. Felice Young started as a secretary and steadily rose up the ranks to the position which she will hold until December 17 of this year.

Felice has always been actively involved with her community and has made significant contributions to many committees, coalitions, projects, and concerns: the December 6 National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, International Women's Day, and Friends of Medicare, to name just a few. In her goodbye message to us Felice advised us that she would still be doing her part to better our province, our country, and our planet. As I am personally familiar with Felice's energy, drive, and passion, as I worked with her at the AFL many years ago, we know this statement will hold true.

We wish her health, peace, happiness, and much success in her future endeavours.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Red Deer College/Canadian University College Collaboration

MRS. GORDON: Thank you. November 10, 1999, was a momentous day for higher education in central Alberta. Ron Woodward, president of Red Deer College, and Randal Wiseby, president of

Canadian University College, officiated at the signing of a letter of understanding between the two institutions. The document formalizes their desire to work together to better meet the needs of students enrolled in postsecondary education in central Alberta. This agreement includes increased opportunities for student learning through degree completion and course transfer arrangements.

Congratulations. I wish both colleges, their faculties and students every success with this new and innovative partnership.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 231 and 232.

[Motion carried]

Provincial Income Tax Cuts

Q231. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. What is the revenue recovery or the economic offset of the \$600 million single rate tax proposal for 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07, and how much of the revenue recovery or economic offset in each fiscal year is accounted for by the elimination of the 8 percent surtax, the elimination of the .5 percent flat tax, the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions to \$11,620, the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions in the 1999 federal budget, and the introduction of the 11 percent single rate?

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks Mr. Speaker. It was just a couple of short weeks ago that we had a little marathon session in Written Questions. We didn't get through all the questions that I have posed on behalf of Albertans regarding the government's tax plan. Written question 231, which stands on the Order Paper in my name, is another one of those questions. I would move that that question be accepted by the government, and I'll quickly explain why I think it's so very important.

The government's Budget '99 document, which, of course, is rapidly becoming a work of fiction anyway because of the supplementary supply estimates and the unbudgeted spending, has as one of its cornerstones a series of tax proposals. If you examine the budget document and look at the section that deals with the economic impacts of the Alberta Tax Review Committee proposal, you'll find some very interesting information.

One of the things you find is that there is a prediction of a 40 percent feedback on the tax cut policy. So what the government is saying in Budget '99 is that for every dollar that is not collected in the form of taxation, 40 cents will be returned to the government through increased economic activity. That is an unprecedented projected feedback. Nowhere in the annals of recorded history has there been such a robust and optimistic prediction.

It leads me to question just how valid it is, particularly since we can't get any of the working papers, any of the documents that Treasury has relied on to come up with this figure. Now, we've requested them through freedom of information. I've picked up the phone and spoken with the Treasurer. Staff in my office have spoken with staff in his office. We've written letters. Now we have

asked for it through the legislative process of motions for returns and written questions. We can't get the information.

We also find that in correspondence the Treasurer has said not that the information hasn't been compiled but that it's just simply not available, and I read that to mean that it's simply not available to members of the Official Opposition and, therefore, is simply not available to members of the public. So it's some kind of secret the Treasurer wants to keep with his cabinet business partners.

Of course, cabinet secrecy is part of the parliamentary process, and it's the Treasurer's prerogative to keep the details a secret, but, Mr. Speaker, I have to ask why. If it is such good news, if the model is so good and it produces such a good result, then you would expect the Treasurer to do as he usually does, you know, to come into the Assembly and find an excuse to stand and trumpet that information, to announce with all the fanfare he can muster what a positive thing this is. You might even expect him to post it on his web site. The one thing you wouldn't expect him to do is sit on it or suppress it or keep it quiet, which reinforces my suspicion that maybe it's not all that good news or maybe the numbers just don't work out quite the way they're presented in Budget '99.

I would urge that all members present today in the Assembly share with me this concern about this need to be transparent and to report to Albertans the facts about the tax plan as proposed by the Treasurer and quickly move to support my motion to accept Written Question 231.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Provincial Treasurer I would move that Written Question 231 be amended by striking out "What is the revenue recovery" and substituting "What information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on the revenue recovery." For the record the amended question would read:

What information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on the revenue recovery or the economic offset of the \$600 million single tax rate proposal for 2003-04, 2004-05, 2005-06, and 2006-07, and how much of the revenue recovery or economic offset in each fiscal year is accounted for by the elimination of the 8 percent surtax, the elimination of the .5 percent flat tax, the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions to \$11,620, the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions in the 1999 federal budget, and the introduction of the 11 percent single rate?

3:00

A couple of observations, Mr. Speaker, if I might. First, I am curious as to why the opposition seems so reticent about a tax plan or reluctant to accept a tax plan that shows taxes going down. The only way it's going is down.

Secondly, I am surprised at some of the comments from the hon. member about a government that is recognized across Canada and emulated by many provinces and copied by many provinces on the openness and accountability of its bookkeeping. He won't be surprised that I am surprised.

The comment that really, really tweaked my interest and again some amazement was his comment about the work of fiction of this government's budgeting process, et cetera. That's a paraphrasing. Well, yesterday the Provincial Treasurer tabled an article, a memo, or document from Standard and Poor's dated December 7, 1999, after this tax plan has been out there, after the adjustments have been made to the budget, after supplementary estimates have been introduced into this House. All of those things that gave Alberta the highest rating again in this country, double A plus. As I don't have the document in my hand, Mr. Speaker, my recollection and the way I read it – and again I'm paraphrasing – it was because of the good budgeting, the openness and accountability, stability and predictability of this government's financial activities.

So I move this amendment, Mr. Speaker, on the hon. Treasurer's behalf in the interest again of open government and our desire to provide information at every opportunity to assist the opposition in understanding that lower taxes are good for our province and Albertans support them.

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

MR. SAPERS: On the amendment. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I haven't been the subject of a lecture like that since I was health critic. It brings back a flood of fond memories. You know, it's interesting to me that I continue to perplex the minister after all these years together.

Let me try to go slowly and explain why I can't accept the amendment, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the amendment would actually render the motion useless. The amendment would gut the motion. In fact, I'm surprised that it even received the blessing of Parliamentary Counsel, because I didn't think you could nullify a motion through an amendment. The motion as put by this hon. member asks for specific information which should be the subject of a written question. It says, "What is the revenue recovery . . .", et cetera, et cetera. A very specific request. The amendment changes that to, "What information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury."

Now, the government could perhaps say, "Some." They could just simply answer the question by saying, "Some." They could say, "None." They could say, "A little." They could say: a few, a bit, many, much. They don't have to provide any details.

In fact, when the minister last spoke on behalf of the Provincial Treasurer in amending some of my written questions, the minister stood and said, you know, that she knew the Treasurer would be forthcoming – I'm paraphrasing as well because I don't have the document – that my fears of not getting information were not well founded and that the information would be there and she was confident. It went on and on and on and on in that vein, Mr. Speaker.

You know, as of this very minute in this day which is rumoured to be the last day of this session of the Legislature, I still have not received a response to the amended motion. I don't know whether it's because the Treasurer has been busy or because his colleague minister didn't tell him about the undertaking she took on his behalf, but I still don't have the information, which means that I can't share that information with my constituents, which means that my job has been impeded because of the Treasurer's reluctance to comply with a motion that was passed by this House. So I think you can understand why I would be hesitant to simply take the Treasurer at his word through his colleague minister's motion to amend to say: yes, we'll get the information.

Now, the amending motion troubles me for another reason. I raised this last time, as you may recall, that we received a batch of proposed amendments from the Treasury Department at exactly the moment in time at which those amendments were due. By your own ruling, Mr. Speaker, the amendments are supposed to be received by the originator of the motion no later than 11 o'clock. We received the last batch at 10:59. I said at that time that I felt sorry for that civil servant who was told to stand poised over the fax machine waiting for the clock to just about strike 11 so that information could be transmitted at exactly the last minute to try to catch me unawares. Well, I no longer feel sorry for that civil servant, because this time whoever that person is from Treasury didn't transmit it at the last possible minute but, in fact, transmitted the amendments five minutes past the deadline. So we didn't get the information on time. We got the amendments at 11:05, not 11 o'clock.

Now, this really speaks to the game that's being played here. I don't mind the Treasurer rejecting sharing pertinent information with taxpayers about how he's planning on spending their money. That's his business, and he'll pay the consequences for that. I don't even mind the government orchestrating things so that they can comply with the rules of this Assembly at the last possible minute. That's their business, if that's the game they want to play. But I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that when it gets to the point where they blatantly break rules and can do so with some impunity or they can mess up motions about due dates on written questions and do so with impunity, it makes me wonder what exactly their game is. I think it makes a mockery out of the process and the procedure that we agree on in this House. I would submit that the Treasurer should sit down with his staff and talk about the need for larger clocks or talk about the need to respect rules, but certainly I would expect that we would see more respect for the rules of this Assembly than what has been demonstrated in the last couple of days by members of the government and Executive Council.

So in sum, Mr. Speaker, I cannot accept this amendment. I don't think it will provide Albertans with the information they deserve. I think it is a disingenuous reply. I don't think the Treasurer has any real intent of following through, providing the pith and substance of the request, and I would urge all members to reject the amendment and support the original motion.

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

3:10

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, when you look at what this amendment has done, it virtually makes a mockery of the information we're seeking, the difference in the question "What is the revenue recovery or the economic offset?" as compared to "What information has been prepared?" Well, that's obviously a duck and dive tactic for the Treasurer to avoid answering the question.

It's interesting that the hon. minister who amended the question for the Treasurer would say they're such an open and accountable government in the same breath as she says they're not giving any information: we're really open and accountable, but we're just not giving you this information.

It seems like we hear all kinds of trial balloons. The Treasurer will say: ah, well, we're going to make this tax cut, and we don't know if it's really going to save any money. That's not part of the big old trial balloon that comes out. We really don't have the numbers and figures to back it up, but we use the words "cut" and "tax," and of course that sells. Of course it does. We all would like to pay less taxes; that's a given. So when things are getting hot, maybe in health care or education, let's do a little tax cut trial balloon. Then when we ask specific questions about it, "Well, we'll give you the information that we've figured out so far," which could mean nothing. That certainly seems the way it is.

I would suggest that when tax dollars are being spent, shouldn't we all get to know what it's going to mean? I don't even see what's the big secret. If the Treasury Department has really projected what this will mean, then why can't the people see what the recovery is, unless it was just one of those little trial balloons that we're going to send out there, take the heat off health care, make everybody happy, and really not answer the question or give the information.

This government put this province desperately in debt, and it is our job to keep their feet to the fire and ask them to answer questions about how they are spending money, what their projections are. If they're saying that we're going to try something new, we'd like to

see some sort of projection, some sort of homework done to prove that it will work for all Albertans. It's a simple request, and the fact that we can't get the information on it begs the question: have they done their homework? And I would bet you, Mr. Speaker, that they have not.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, on the amended motion, time will tell. We've gone over this ground. Time will tell whether the Treasurer comes through with anything that's going to be helpful and useful, and you know, we'll have an opportunity to ask him again.

But the facts are such, Mr. Speaker, that I cannot allow this debate to end without dealing with a couple of the assertions made by the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations about the tax plan and the fact that taxes are only going down. The minister is somewhat selective in her telling of the story. Of course, it is very good news indeed that Standard and Poor's has given Alberta the fine credit rating that it has achieved. I am the first to stand here and say: thank goodness for those hardworking men and women who make this economy tick along and who in spite of government policy manage to build one of the healthiest economies in North America.

Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't talk at all about the over 800 user fees that have been either created or increased since this government came to power and the billions of dollars that have been raised and the fact that under threat of court order the province is going through a very laborious, a very detailed review of all those user fees to figure out which ones are, in fact, illegal taxes. The minister didn't mention that. The minister didn't talk about the fact that the only tax reform this government has actually stepped up to the plate and served up has been to eliminate that extra tax that only the wealthiest of Albertans, the highest income earners pay, that surtax that only the wealthiest of our constituents will pay. They did that, Mr. Speaker, to the exclusion of eliminating the flat tax that almost every tax filer in Alberta pays, so it was a very selective case of applying tax relief. Give tax relief to the rich first is the motto of this government.

Then we take a look at the whole issue of bracket creep, which this provincial government has identified and points fingers at the federal government. Bracket creep, of course, is the collection of taxes because your rate goes up because of inflation. You have to pay more tax, and you go into another tax bracket not due to anything other than the fact that there's been some inflationary pressures. So this government has picked the pockets of Albertans to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars just due to bracket creep, even though the Treasurer says that some other level of government ought to deal with that issue.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you take a look at the imposition of all these user fees, you take a look at bracket creep, you take a look at the selective tax reduction for the rich – and I'll hasten to add that this government has had at its disposal billions and billions and billions of dollars of surpluses, and you know how much of that they've dedicated to tax relief? It's about 4 percent, I think. So this government talks a good game and creates the expectation and the aura around tax cuts but doesn't deliver.

The most substantive tax cuts that Albertans are going to enjoy this tax year come about as a result of Paul Martin and the federal Liberal government, which raised the personal exemption. Bless the federal government for putting action behind its words of tax cuts.

I would encourage these provincial laggards here in Alberta to catch up and do what Albertans are demanding in terms of providing the promised tax relief. How can a government that has a \$3 billion surplus stuffed into its overflowing pockets look into a mirror and look at itself and say: well, you know, we're still working on the tax cuts, but we're going to keep talking about it because we want people to believe that there are tax cuts even though we're not going to really deliver them.

It was a good, valiant effort on the part of the hon. minister opposite to raise the arguments, and of course it was appropriate that she did, but the arguments even so passionately and well put don't make them correct, and it saddens me that she's in this position of speaking for the Treasurer on this. I just hope that we will get some information of some value as a result of this amended motion, and I hope it comes quickly, perhaps before the end of the millennium would be nice.

So, Mr. Speaker, we're stuck with an amended motion. I don't like it. We'll see what happens. We'll see whether the information is forthcoming.

[Written Question 231 as amended carried]

Speaker's Ruling Screening of Amendments

THE SPEAKER: Clerk, before we go forward. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, several things were stated in part of the overview that you presented here this afternoon that I think for the record we should just clarify. Everything we say and do in this House is recorded in *Hansard*. Under Standing Order 2 there are two things.

I'm sure I heard the hon. member correctly, but because everything is recorded in *Hansard*, perhaps in a month from now or in the next century historians will look back at the debates in this House and will really wonder what was meant here. When the hon. member said that he was surprised that the amendment even received the approval of Parliamentary Counsel, this was not a slur attached to Parliamentary Counsel. This was a rhetorical question in debate that the hon. member was just questioning in a questioning way. It was not an attack on an officer of the Legislative Assembly. I'll ask the hon. member to just clarify. I just want the record to be absolutely sure of that.

Then when the hon. member went on, he essentially was quoting from Standing Order 15(1) but never really said he wanted to raise an order of privilege about somebody violating the rules of the Assembly. I want to make sure that the hon. member is not leading to a point of privilege either, because I want to close my books, too, as we close the century before coming back. Would you just clarify for the chair, please, under Standing Order 2 that I understand correctly?

3:20

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to clarify both of those points. Let me make the first point as abundantly clear as I can. I was surprised with the amendment, as I stated, because it seemed to me to nullify the motion, and that surprised me. It was not a slur on Parliamentary Counsel. I have utmost respect for Parliamentary Counsel and admire the hard work that they do on behalf of all members of this Assembly. That notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, I was surprised.

The second point. I think the reference that you make is to the part of my argument about the amendment somehow prohibiting me to do my job to the best of my ability because I can't share the information?

THE SPEAKER: No, hon. member. It had to do with timing.

MR. SAPERS: Oh, okay.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member did provide some degree of explanation with respect to it but didn't allow the chair to know where he was going with it, and if it has something to do with the violation of the rules, the hon. member does have choices. The hon. member can do nothing. The hon. member can raise a point of privilege if it is a violation of the hon. member's role in this Assembly.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was considering the options, and in fact the Opposition House Leader and I had a brief discussion about what the range of options might be regarding the way in which these written questions were handled, starting from the Deputy Government House Leader's motion yesterday through to the timing of the received amendments. My purpose was simply to put the issues on the record to make sure that it is recorded in *Hansard*, but I don't intend on pursuing a matter of privilege on this point.

Provincial Income Tax Cuts

Q232. Mr. Sapers moved that the following question be accepted. How much of the \$120 million economic offset or revenue recovery projected in 2002-03 as cited on page 17 of Budget '99, government of Alberta fiscal plan, results from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax, from the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions contained in the 1999 federal budget, from the elimination of the .5 percent flat tax, from the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions to \$11,620, and from the introduction of the 11 percent single rate?

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The purpose of this is clear. Again we have the government making assertions about economic offset or revenue recovery. We want to know how much of that is due to the various fiscal and economic elements that are cited in the motion. It seems to me that it would be impossible for the government to come to the conclusion, to come to a final number without having looked at and analyzed all of the components that would make up that number.

I do know from correspondence that I've received from the Treasurer that some analysis was in fact done, but we don't know, Mr. Speaker, what the nature of that analysis was. So I think it's about time that Albertans knew how this government went about its decision-making process and shared with us and with all taxpayers the information sought in Written Question 232.

The tax plan is still one of those key platforms of the provincial government, and almost any day you can listen to the Premier or the Treasurer talking about their tax plan, and we would just like to see what exactly it is that they're basing their assertions on. If it turns out that they're just wild guesses, then we would expect that they would say so, that this is just some targets that they've set and it's just the direction that they want to move. If it's more than that, then they have the analysis, they have the documentary evidence, and I'm sure they'll be anxious to share it with us.

I would move ready acceptance of Written Question 232.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would move on behalf of the hon. Provincial Treasurer that Written Question 232 be amended by striking out "how much" and substituting "what information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on how much." So the question as amended will read:

What information has been prepared by or for Alberta Treasury on how much of the \$120 million economic offset or revenue recovery projected in 2002-03 as cited on page 17 of Budget 1999, government of Alberta fiscal plan, results from the elimination of the 8 percent surtax, from the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions contained in the 1999 federal budget, from the elimination of the .5 percent flat tax, from the increase in the personal and spousal exemptions to \$11,620, and from the introduction of the 11 percent single rate?

Mr. Speaker, in the interest of House time I'm going to resist the really difficult choice of responding to some of the comments inasmuch as I don't want to have a prolonged discussion of the tax plan of this government, as proud as I am of it. I don't want to have to explain to the hon. member again about the acceleration of the tax plan. I think he must have missed that, by his comments. I would agree with him that the men and women of this province have devoted their time and energies and have been very successful in ensuring that this is the healthiest economy in Canada.

I'm not going to read copious testimonies from the individuals and companies that have chosen to do business in our province, citing many things such as tax policies of this government, stable government, balanced budgets, debt reduction, all of those things that are often there. I'm probably not going to comment on the fact that our Provincial Treasurer will be encouraging the Liberal federal Minister of Finance to follow our lead and reduce the tax burden on all Canadians, including Albertans. I'm certainly not going to debate the issue as to whether it was this government's policy or the federal government's national energy program that drove this province into a debt situation.

I move this amended question.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Yes, on the amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the hon. minister I am going to debate this question, and I am going to comment on this provincial government that has put us billions of dollars into debt. Are we just to openly trust their projections of tax changes? I don't think so. I think every Albertan deserves some answers, and once again this amendment is rendered useless with this kind of answer to the question.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Instead of saying how much, which reminds me of a movie, show me the money, or a little song like money makes the world go around or *Pennies from Heaven* – you know, there are a few little things here that go through our mind as we think about the way this government lacks the ability to plan and to budget. So when this kind of presentation of tax change is made to the people of Alberta, one would think we'd have the right to question it, and if it really is a good move, one would think the Treasurer would answer it.

3:30

So when we get an answer that says, "What information has been prepared?" you know what? If they actually answered the question, "How much?" then they could boast and brag that they're an accountable government. But right now when they say, "What information has been prepared?" they might say: "Well, we didn't

put it together in a booklet yet, so it's not really prepared. We haven't three-hole punched it, so it's not really prepared. We haven't put a glossy cover on it, so it's not really prepared."

MR. SAPERS: It's kind of like that uncooked Christmas turkey.

MRS. SOETAERT: It's kind of like that uncooked Christmas turkey. Madam Speaker, you know, it's like asking for information and getting back 63 pages, 62 of which were whited out.

This is a simple request for information, and if this government truly was accountable, they would give that information. In fact, they should brag about it and boast about it and say: this is what it's going to do, and here's how we can prove it.

Now, certainly with the department right there, with the Treasurer's resources in the government department, can he not get us that information or is he choosing not to give us that information? One would venture to say that it is the latter: he is choosing not to give us that information. You know, on this supposedly last day of session, one would think we could get some information, that they'd have one last kick at the cat of being open and accountable, but no. We saw closure last night. We see nonanswers today. Some things just don't change in this province, but next election I'm sure they will.

Thanks, Madam Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I guess I am going to close debate on this amended motion.

MRS. NELSON: Good. Sit down.

MR. SAPERS: The minister of essentially very little – what is it? Government Services? – was saying that I should just sit down. Is that what the minister was saying? You see, minister, this is the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly. What happens in here is debate. So I'll take my opportunity to do that.

Now, the amended motion I don't think will render much information. You know, the house of cards that the Treasurer built just keeps on getting bigger and bigger and bigger. They must be afraid of this information. They must be afraid of something or hiding something. Otherwise, as I said earlier, I'm sure that they would simply provide the information. If it was good, solid arithmetic, they'd share it with us.

MR. DICKSON: We wish they treated our health information as carefully as they treat this.

MR. SAPERS: My colleague from Calgary-Buffalo makes an interesting observation, that if the protection of health information that was in this forced-through Bill 40 was as strong as the protection of this budget information, then we would be satisfied with the protection in Bill 40, but of course what this government does is talk out of both sides of its mouth when it comes to providing information. They say that they want to provide the information. They even put amendments through on written questions that make it look to a casual observer as though they wish to supply information, but in fact they wish to do nothing of the kind.

Now, when the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations was speaking, she mentioned the accelerated tax plan of

the government. I'm glad she mentioned that, because I did want to make some comments about the tax plan and the acceleration of that tax plan.

The Treasurer and the Premier recently discovered that they have a budget surplus. It came as a big surprise to them, and when they woke up that morning and found that they had the budget surplus, they made an announcement to Albertans that they were going to think real hard again about some tax cuts. Then a few days later – I guess after they slept on it – they accelerated the part of their tax plan that provides a 50 percent reduction in the surtax that the highest income earners pay. They said that they were going to do that a little more quickly than they otherwise might have.

Let's take a look at who benefits and who doesn't benefit from that acceleration of the province's tax plan. Now, it's clear that some Albertans will benefit. For example, Madam Speaker, I know you in particular will be interested to know that a cabinet minister earning \$75,000 a year will save \$249 per year from the elimination of the surtax. That's good news for those lucky couple of dozen Albertans who are in cabinet. A deputy minister earning \$100,000 will save \$495 a year as a result of that tax cut. Good for them.

Now, do you want to know who does not benefit, Madam Speaker? A family of four headed by two hardworking civil servants. Two public servants being paid by the taxpayers of Alberta, a family of four headed by two such hardworking public servants, one earning \$60,000 a year and the other earning \$40,000 a year will save – wait for it – \$56 per year as a result of this government's accelerated tax cut plan. That's 15 cents per day that they'll save. Thank you, Provincial Treasurer.

Let's take a look at who else doesn't benefit. A single nurse working in Lloydminster in that health region who earns \$40,000 a year will save zero dollars per year. A goose egg. Nothing. A lump of coal from the Treasurer for the hardworking nurse in Lloydminster from the elimination of this surtax. A family in Lethbridge with one spouse earning \$55,000 a year as a peace officer and the other staying at home raising the family's three children will save just \$16 per year or the princely sum of 4 cents per day from the elimination of this surtax.

The government talks a good talk about its tax plan and likes to gather headlines by talking about accelerating the tax plan, but where the rubber meets the road in the real lives of everyday Albertans, in fact it's nothing but hot air. It's about time that they owned up to that, Madam Speaker. It's about time that the government fessed up that it's all talk and no action when it comes to tax relief in this province: sustainable, comprehensive, across-the-board tax relief that would provide real benefits to real Albertans and not just the fictitious ones that the Treasurer talks about in his news releases.

You know, I had a phone call from a senior in Grande Prairie yesterday, Madam Speaker, and the senior was saying: with all of this surplus talk, how come I'm still living in poverty? Then the senior went on to tell me about his particular circumstances. You know, I've run the numbers, and any senior citizen in this province that has an income of \$30,000 or less will benefit exactly not at all from this government's accelerated tax cut. Zero benefit for that senior citizen. That is shameful, and this government really ought to rethink its plan and start providing the relief that Albertans deserve.

After all, it was on the backs of the men and the women of this province who lost their jobs and lost opportunities and had to wait in line and who put their children in overcrowded classrooms and couldn't get into hospitals and had to pay more for ambulance services – it's all of those Albertans who helped create this budget surplus. It's those Albertans who should be rewarded, not just the friends of the Premier.

I would argue that this motion as amended won't benefit the Official Opposition, won't benefit the taxpayers of this province, won't benefit anybody except those in government that like to keep secrets. Those are the only people that are going to benefit from this amendment.

So I would ask all of the right-thinking members of this Assembly – and I know there are many that are fiscally responsible and wanted to see the right thing – to unshackle themselves from their whip and do the right thing and defeat this amended motion just to send a signal to that arrogant government that they just can't get away with telling these stories anymore and they just can't get away with keeping secrets from taxpayers anymore.

3:40

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora has moved acceptance of Written Question 232 as amended. All those in favour of the motion as amended please say aye.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: No.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: It's carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:40]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Amery	Hierath	O'Neill
Burgener	Jacques	Paszkowski
Cao	Johnson	Pham
Cardinal	Klapstein	Renner
Doerksen	Kryczka	Severtson
Ducharme	Laing	Shariff
Dunford	Lougheed	Smith
Fischer	Marz	Stelmach
Friedel	McClellan	Strang
Graham	Melchin	Tarchuk
Haley	Nelson	Trynchy
Hancock	Oberg	Zwozdesky
Herard		

3:50

Against the motion:

Bonner	Olsen	Sloan
Dickson	Paul	Soetaert
Leibovici	Sapers	

Totals:	For - 37	Against - 8
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[Written Question 232 as amended carried]

head: Motions for Returns

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

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again it's my

pleasure to rise and this time move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

Bill 208
Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act

[Debate adjourned December 7: Ms Olsen speaking]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close debate. Hon. member, someone else has stood.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Madam Speaker, I'll be very brief, actually. I just wanted to share an experience that I had this week when I attended two schools in the Grande Prairie area. I met with the students, and part of the experience that we shared was discussing the bill that the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose had brought forward. We discussed it at some length with two classrooms, and I was surprised at the degree of knowledge that these particular young people had experienced regarding smoking, regarding the dangers and the ramifications of smoking. I was pleasantly surprised, I might add.

We discussed the pros and the cons, and certainly there are pros and cons, as were debated in this Legislature, and we concluded with a vote. At that time I committed to the students of the particular classes that we were discussing the issue with that I would indeed support whatever their views and their ideas were.

I think it's interesting to note that when those students voted – and there were 26 in one class and 24 in the other class – in one case the vote was 23 to 3 in favour of Bill 208, that the hon. member has presented, and the other was 22 to 2 in favour of supporting Bill 208. I think that is really a very positive indication. It's an indication that, indeed, we are making progress and that we are understanding some of the costs to society, the huge societal costs that come about as a result of what I consider one of the dirtiest habits ever inflicted upon mankind.

It's very gratifying to see the youth of our country firmly understanding some of the societal ramifications that have come about. In the discussion I was surprised to see that they were knowledgeable enough to discuss the issues of the unborn child, medical needs to society, societal costs and responsibilities, the responsibilities of parents to their children as well, and spending money in areas that really are questionable, to say the least.

I thought I'd share that experience with you, because indeed I consider it very gratifying to know that even the young children of this province fully understand the horrible ramifications of a dirty habit.

I will be supporting the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose on this particular piece of legislation.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Oh, I'm sorry again, hon. member.

Members, when you do wish to speak, stand right up so that the chair can recognize you.

MS PAUL: Actually, Madam Speaker, I did stand up, but I probably got confused way back here with all the red. I'm kidding.

Anyway, I'm just going to make a few comments with respect to Bill 208. I think it's honourable that the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose did bring this forward as a private member's bill. The issue of smoking and teenagers is an issue that has to be addressed. I'm not a hundred percent sure it should be addressed as part of legislation to follow, I'm sure, after a private member's bill has been introduced. I like the idea that there will be a pilot project to see if this is in fact going to work.

4:00

The concerns I have, though, Madam Speaker, with legislation and chastising or trying to police teenagers with respect to carrying or smoking cigarettes – I think the onus is not so much on the work that the police force would have to do with respect to implementing legislation like this, but the onus should be on the parents. I think it's the parents' responsibility to teach their children that smoking is a very, very bad habit. It's a habit that incurs a lot of health problems down the road. It also clogs up our hospitals, our systems with all kinds of problems that occur from lifelong smoking and on and on.

I think we should address secondhand smoke too, Madam Speaker. I don't know whether it's been addressed during the discussions on the bill. Secondhand smoking actually has been found to be just as much of a concern as firsthand smoking.

Madam Speaker, while it is honourable that the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose did bring the bill forward – as all members of this Legislature know, private members' bills are something that are very near and dear to our hearts, and obviously there was a need for him to come forward with it – I think there are probably, without a word of a lie, more issues, more needs in the community and in society for our police forces to be attending to rather than trying to catch a handful of teenagers with a pack of smokes, either inhaling or in their shirt.

So with those comments, Madam Speaker, I'll sit down.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my researcher and all of those many Albertans, right from the south to the north, the east to the west, from all walks of life, who did participate in this project. One of the things I've learned is that there is a great deal of support for this particular bill, and I enjoy and I appreciate the support of students in particular. It was very gratifying to me to get full support from the University of Alberta medical students, for example, people that really know what the effects of tobacco are on health. It was very gratifying one day when many of them showed up at my office just to offer their support.

I would also like to acknowledge a letter I received from the Minister of Children's Services, who just walked in, I see, but was not able to participate in the debate, who expresses her support for the bill. It certainly is great to get support from the minister, because this, of course, is a children's issue, and the main objective is to protect children.

Throughout the century, until the '90s, it was against federal law for youth to possess or consume tobacco products. Since then, tobacco legislation has become totally silent on the issues of standards and expectations for our youth. I believe we have left them orphaned and without direction in relation to tobacco use. The new message seems to be: it's someone else's fault if you smoke. That, I suggest, is not a good message for our youth.

Now in the '90s the percentage of youth smoking is rising

significantly, to where close to 30 percent of our youth use tobacco products, and significantly more youth in the 11-, 12-, 13-year-old category are taking up the habit. So far there has been little response to address the issue where the problem really exists; that is, youth consumption of tobacco products.

In their search for direction youth are finding answers through their peers and through marketing efforts of tobacco companies but no longer through the law. There is a price to be paid for this omission. As more and more youth become addicted, the price escalates: the human costs and the costs of our health care system. Bill 208 addresses this huge problem and complements the federal Tobacco Act. It restores a norm. It restores some guidelines and expectations for our youth, and it will contribute to a healthy, well society.

In the end this is a bill that enables a commonsense solution to our youth tobacco use problem. It simply enables communities and districts throughout our province to establish programs to reduce youth smoking modeled after what I have found in my research to be the best results of any youth antitobacco initiative anywhere: the Woodridge, Illinois, program, where they produced reduction rates of 70 percent by a simple, commonsense, inexpensive approach involving an anticonsumption and possession law. I believe we can achieve similar results, but we need to provide our communities with the legislation that we have before us today.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark mentioned four groups that have a concern relative to the federal enforcement of retail sales. That problem will be dealt with, as I have suggested in my opening remarks; that is, government legislation prior to proclamation of this law. While there may be four groups that have concerns, there are numerous groups including health authorities; school boards; as I mentioned, medical students; the police force; ATRA; businesses; and students themselves who are in favour of this bill. Polls indicate that our citizens expect us to do something about this problem of youth tobacco use. That is why there is a need for this bill. People really do want wellness in our society. The bill addresses a real need, and I ask for your support.

More than anything to keep me going on this problem was a comment from one of the youth in my constituency. As I talked about the effects of tobacco use, he said: if it's so bad, why don't you make it illegal like you do for liquor or seat belts? So I'm going to answer that for him today. Ladies and gentlemen, I would hope you would support this bill.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a third time]

Bill 210 Charitable Donation of Food Act

MRS. LAING: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to move third reading of Bill 210, Charitable Donation of Food Act.

It's very fitting that Bill 210 is in third reading today at this festive time of the year, the Christmas season. I know that each of us in the course of going about preparing for our celebrations with family, friends, and colleagues will pause to reflect how lucky and fortunate we are to enjoy the quality and standard of living that we possess. In doing so, we must remember that there are many people here in Alberta who are less fortunate.

For food banks Christmas is the high point of the year, a time when they see their donations increase substantially and when they try to put much nonperishable food on the shelves. I'm deeply humbled by this realization and the thought that food banks often struggle through the rest of the year to fill the needs of the less

fortunate. Regrettably, food banks are still a necessary institution for some Albertans year-round, not just at Christmas.

Bill 210 is a positive step forward, Madam Speaker, and it will change for the better the way that food donations are made. It will open the door to more regular and increased donations from organizations such as grocery stores who have a constant supply of surplus food that is still fit for consumption. Currently much of this food is thrown away, if it is not donated, mainly because of the liability concerns that exist under our current laws. Bill 210 will amend these constraints by giving immunity from liability to food banks and donors who in good faith provide the food they know and believe to be safe for consumption.

This bill makes sense and has enjoyed a great deal of support from the stakeholders, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for their phone calls, letters, and faxes of support and their suggestions on how we can improve this bill. Many have reminded me that for some time they have been calling for this type of legislation.

I would like to make special mention of the Alberta food bank association and the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors, who have supported this bill from its inception. I would also like to make special mention of the people behind the scenes who worked closely with me researching the idea, consulting with key stakeholders, and preparing this bill for introduction into the Legislature: the hon. Minister of Community Development, Ms Angela Brown, Mr. David Keto, Mr. Peter Thomas, and especially my legislative assistant, Mrs. Brenda Goebel. I would like to express my appreciation for their support and their assistance. I would also like to thank all members of the Assembly for their support on the previous stages of Bill 210.

In closing, I would like to issue each member a challenge. Whether you support this bill or not, when you leave this Chamber for the weekend, take some time to purchase a donation for your local food bank. It's both needed and appreciated.

Thank you.

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

4:10

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased this afternoon to rise at third reading and speak on Bill 210, the Charitable Donation of Food Act, and to also indicate my support for this bill. The issue of liability surrounding the donation of food is something that was raised early on to me in my visits to food banks in this province. The suggestion of having some type of legislation to protect these nonprofit agencies who are in a position of providing food was an important one, and it was raised on more than one occasion. So I credit the hon. member for her sponsoring of this bill.

Alberta is following the course of a number of other provinces in this country that have enacted Good Samaritan legislation. I think at present count approximately six have that legislation in place.

Madam Speaker, we have identified sectionally the areas where the bill is sufficient in its provisions to provide protection, and in this respect we are supportive of the bill as it is presented today. There are of course going to be overlaps between the enactment of this act and the responsibilities that are undertaken by public health and food inspection professionals in the fulfillment of their responsibilities under legislation regulations. So I think it provides a good framework and partnership to protect both the public and the providers of food.

With those comments I am prepared to conclude my remarks.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to add a couple of observations as well. The first one is that this is an excellent idea. I remember Terry Wilson of the Calgary Inter-faith Food Bank many years ago talking about the need for this kind of legislation, and it's one of the good ideas that I'm disappointed we hadn't seen in a government initiative before. Full credit to the Member for Calgary-Bow for giving us this opportunity to deal with it in the Assembly.

I'd also mark that the Member for Calgary-Bow has perhaps been one of the members in this Assembly who knows as well as anyone and better than most of us the related problems of homelessness, and I refer specifically to the city of Calgary. It's hard to isolate food bank use without recognizing that it's part of a very complex matrix of problems, of people who aren't being able to access the services they require.

I'm still a bit frustrated, despite the best efforts of the Member for Calgary-Bow, who has been one of the leaders in the Calgary Housing Authority and Homeless Foundation, that she hasn't received more support in a corporate way from the government of the province of Alberta. You know, when Claudette Bradshaw, the federal Minister of Labour, came to Calgary, there was a meeting with representatives of the Calgary Housing Authority and Art Smith – and the Member for Calgary-Bow was certainly there – and Calgary city council and the chamber. It was a pretty high-powered group of people. It was interesting that one of the issues that came up, Madam Speaker, was what additional things the federal government could do.

The thing that kept crossing my mind as we talked about issues of homelessness and access to mental health services, a host of issues, access to food and that sort of thing, was that there wasn't a lot of focus on what the provincial government can and should be doing. [interjection] Well, some members may suggest that this is a different problem, but in Calgary-Buffalo the issue of people not being able to access food for their families is closely, closely related to homelessness and that other range of issues. I know the Member for Calgary-Bow understands, I'd say, well the interconnection of these different issues.

I'm frankly taking advantage of the opportunity to not only congratulate the Member for Calgary-Bow but hopefully gently chide all members in this Assembly, particularly my Calgary colleagues, to look at what things we can do in terms of pressing our provincial government to look at a much stronger approach to dealing with homelessness.

The reality, I think, that we've found in Calgary is that as powerful and as aggressive and as effective a lobby as the Homeless Foundation is in Calgary, with very high-powered individuals, titans of industry in Calgary providing leadership, it still isn't enough. I think people who work in this area in Calgary acknowledge that it's a terrific effort to generate funding and assistance, but it's not enough.

I go back to something that June Callwood said, something of a hero to me, when she came to Edmonton a couple of years ago to a Municipal Affairs sponsored symposium on housing. She made an observation, something to the effect that the private sector will provide good low-cost housing when pigs can fly, the notion being that there's a big role for the provincial government to play in terms of providing support in a host of different ways.

I hope the same spirit that animates the Member for Calgary-Bow and I think earns a lot of support and respect around this particular bill, around the Good Samaritan food bank legislation, would also spill over, that that same sort of concern would animate a commitment on the part of the province of Alberta and our provincial government to find ways of addressing those issues related to poverty. I don't want to see another winter go by in Calgary with as

many men, women, and children living on the streets in Calgary-Buffalo and in other parts of downtown Calgary.

This is a significant step, but let's not think, as we wrap up the session here, that we've really solved any problems. It's a positive forward step, but there's a lot more that has to be done. That's not in any way to diminish the bill but just to make sure that we renew our commitment to move on some of those other issues that the Member for Calgary-Bow has provided some very helpful leadership on and we keep on moving in that direction.

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

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a third time]

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

Bill 212
Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 1999

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to begin debate on Bill 212, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act. This act is really very simple. It proposes that we raise the legal drinking age in Alberta from 18 to 19 years in order to harmonize our age limit with that of the majority of provinces in Canada and, more importantly, to take a necessary step to help get alcohol out of our schools. Alberta, Quebec, and Manitoba are the only three provinces today in Canada who have a drinking age of 18. Ontario raised theirs to 19 years in 1979, and the rest of our provinces and territories presently have a minimum drinking age of 19.

Madam Speaker, the teenaged group in society has a lower tolerance for alcohol and a generally higher threshold of risk-taking. These two factors, combined with inexperience in both drinking and driving, put this tender age group in an extremely high-risk category for alcohol-related death and injury.

Drinking and driving is by far the largest criminal cause of death and injury in Canada. Nationally, motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death for teenagers, and alcohol and excess speed are two key factors. The second highest rate of reported alcohol-impaired driving for both male and female drivers occurred among the drivers aged 18 to 20 years.

4:20

According to the Alberta Motor Association, traffic injuries are the leading cause of death and disablement for our young Albertans. They report that injuries account for more years of life loss than any disease in Alberta, making it a leading and generally unrecognized public health issue. The American experience with raising the minimum drinking age confirms that there are significant, sustained benefits to be gained from a higher minimum drinking age. These include decreased traffic injuries, fatalities, reduced underage drinking, and related problems such as assaults. The association also recognized the benefits of bringing Alberta's legislation in this regard in line with B.C. and Saskatchewan in order to eliminate the cross-border drinking trips and the tragedy that too often accompanies these incidents.

The AMA recommends that the most effective strategy would be to raise the drinking age, ensure strict enforcement of the new law, enforce a public awareness campaign, and a graduated licensing program. This is a comprehensive approach, Madam Speaker, and Bill 212 has a significant role to play in achieving this.

One argument against raising the drinking age is that maintaining

the 18 age limit offers a positive view of young people and their ability to make responsible choices. I have to commend those young people who have taken it under their own initiative to engage in different programs that are available and currently being promoted throughout the province as well as the designated driver program, but there is a certain portion of young people who are very capable of making informed decisions regarding alcohol despite being under the legal age. However, there's still a great number of young people who are not able to make those kinds of decisions. Madam Speaker, as a government we're not responsible for legislating things that only pertain to the responsible minority. We're also responsible for making laws that will benefit the majority of Albertans.

Bill 212 does not propose a harsh restriction on our young people. It proposes a measure that will add to alleviating the problem of alcohol in our schools and protect our young people from the risks of drinking and driving. That, in my mind, is a very positive initiative for our young people.

I agree that it's important to assign responsibilities to our young people in order to develop their character and to encourage them to become productive members in Alberta, but I also feel that it's better to assign some of these responsibilities in a gradual fashion.

Allowing a young person to drink legally before they have even passed the milestone of high school graduation is completely contradictory. Why would we legalize something potentially harmful to both their health and safety before they've even graduated from high school and, in doing so, allow its availability in our schools, where the rest of the population is only younger or further below the legal age limit? In this province a young person can get their learner's licence at 14. They can get their driver's licence at 16, and generally speaking students are able to graduate at 18 years of age from high school. This process is helpful in teaching a young person responsibility as well as consequences. Throwing in the opportunity to drink and the responsibility of not giving alcohol to their friends, their peers who are still minors is beyond reason.

A person becomes eligible to consume alcohol based on the date of their 18th birthday. This is simply because of the nature of legislating a legal drinking age. However, a student graduates from high school, a far more significant milestone, at the same time of year as the rest of their peers in that grade. This is based on their achievements academically, not reaching a predetermined age. Both drinking as well as driving at any legislatively predetermined age in my mind, Madam Speaker, are privileges, not rights. We allow students the responsibility of drinking alcohol simply based on the date of their birth yet require students to prove themselves capable academically before giving them a high school diploma. Isn't this contradictory?

Peer pressure is something that is very real among young people and more real than in any other group in society. Why we would assume that our young people who happen to have their 18th birthday before graduation in June are responsible enough to drink and not succumb to the peer pressure of providing alcohol to their friends who are under the legal age limit is a question we must think about.

The bill that I'm asking the 83 legislators here to consider is not a step backward. In effect, it would give us a pause, Madam Speaker, if I could call it that, a pause that would allow a full year's transition. Nobody who is currently 18 would be disenfranchised from legally consuming alcohol. It wouldn't have to take place until a year after proclamation. Nobody would lose a lounge job because they were 18. They would manage to be able to maintain the lounge job, the catering job, the waiter/waitress job that they have in lounges and licensed facilities for a year.

In fact, all of our youth who are currently 18 would retain this

privilege until this bill came into effect one year from proclamation. Controlling access and the availability of alcohol to our young people would go a long way to reducing the negative effects of alcohol on a certain portion of our teens. I know that some of our teens will still find a way to get alcohol – probably everyone in this Legislative Assembly did when they had to be 21 – but some would not. Aren't they worth it?

AADAC has stated that the current legal drinking age reduces risk to young drivers. Well, as legislators we have a responsibility to all of society, not only our young people, to keep our roads safe and ensure that whatever legislation is in place is necessary to reduce the risks associated with alcohol use.

Mothers Against Drinking Drivers, or MADD Canada, provided me with some thoughts on this bill idea. They as well as the AMA support an increased drinking age in conjunction with a graduated licensing program for young drivers.

The Traffic Injury Research Foundation estimates that every year in Canada over 3,000 people are killed in road crashes. Some 250,000 people are injured, many seriously and many permanently. Nearly half of the teenagers who die in this country do so as the result of injuries sustained in road crashes. The economic costs are enormous, estimated at \$25 billion a year, not to mention the personal, emotional, and social consequences that the families feel.

In Alberta the Traffic Safety Act contains a provision for establishing a graduated licensing program through regulation in the province. This proposed regulation would set out the requirements and the restrictions for all new drivers regardless of age. The graduated licensing program is not scheduled to come into effect until early 2001, with the proclamation of the Traffic Safety Act.

Alberta has taken other positive initiatives. On December 1, just a few days ago, Alberta Infrastructure implemented the administrative licence suspension program. By way of information, Madam Speaker, in the United States the majority of states have the legal drinking age of 21, and this was enacted in 1984 under the National Minimum Drinking Age Act. Their act strongly encourages every state to have laws prohibiting the purchase and public possession of alcoholic beverages by anyone under 21 years of age by withholding a portion of federal aid highway funds from the states without such laws. I'm not promoting anything of the kind, moving up to 21, merely taking a pause, Madam Speaker.

4:30

Before I wind up, I would like to anticipate some of the comments that I know have been brought up to me in private and in times past. To be quite honest, folks, the first one I hear is that if you're old enough to fight for your country, you're old enough to drink. Well, folks, when's the last time we had a war on this continent? If you're in the armed forces and you happen to be in Saskatchewan, the age there is 19. If you're in Manitoba, it's 18. All the other provinces except Alberta are 19. Besides that, if you're in the armed forces and you're in a mess, you're capable of getting the alcohol. Let's not ever confuse the right to bear arms with the privilege of drinking.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Eighteen years is in fact an age that our young people can enter a legal agreement and also an age limit that entitles everyone the franchised vote. This isn't an infringement on the Charter of Rights, because it's an arbitrary age limit that's been established, just as the driving age of 16 is an arbitrary age limit.

I will admit here and now that 18 years of age or 19 or 20 will never prevent any of the bootlegging. That's what some of us used to refer to as the illegal acquiring of alcohol. It never will, and I

don't suspect that changing this bill would prevent that. I do think it's very, very important to try to do something to support the public, the private, and the school system in general in helping our teachers deal with the problem of alcohol in the schools.

I don't know what's so magical about arguing about drinking and driving when we wouldn't suggest lowering alcohol levels from the current .08 to .05. They too are arbitrary numbers. It could just as easily be .10.

Part of the larger puzzle that provides a partial solution to a potential killer of our youth deals with raising this age to 19. Alcohol levels, graduated licensing, safe grads, designated driver programs, Operation Red Nose, and the DARE program are all very worth while. A one-year shift could be a complementary change that could help complete this whole puzzle.

Mr. Speaker, we want to endorse antismoking promotions. We want to ban tobacco acquisitions. In fact, we have municipalities banning smoking in many public places; we've just dealt with the bill today. People can jump on bandwagons about what is good for their long-term health, but everyone seems a little reluctant to raise a drinking age and potentially save many lives and many unneeded injuries. We want people to get active, to participate. We want to look at mandating helmets and seat belts and not riding in the back of open vehicles and the use of cellular phones, but we won't talk about raising the legal drinking age 365 days.

At the turn of the century the average life expectancy was around 40 years. Today it's 80, and they're forecasting that in years to come it'll be 120. People have many, many opportunities once they reach 18, 19, or 20 to take alcohol and use it as a social/recreational outlet if they so choose, but I don't think it's unreasonable to expect or to ask people to think of what's in the best interests of your children, your grandchildren, or your neighbours' kids.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to conclude my remarks on this proposal that I have before the Legislative Assembly. I would only ask everyone to give it their own clear-conscience thought. Think about your constituents at home and support the bill.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Before I call on the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

head: Introduction of Guests
(*reversion*)

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce two grade 6 classes that are with us, 45 students from Dr. Clark school in Fort McMurray. Our slogan is We Have the Energy, and all of these young students from Dr. Clark truly do exemplify that energy. We have two teachers here today as well as eight parents, and I'd ask all of them if they could all rise and show their energy and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: All of our young guests should know that today before the Assembly is a very important debate on a bill. It's called second reading of a bill. The hon. Member for Little Bow is introducing a bill that will change the age of legal ability to drink in the province of Alberta from age 18 to 19. If it's approved by this Assembly, it will become the law.

Now we'll hear from the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

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

Bill 212
Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 1999
(*continued*)

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've seen this bill come to the Assembly before, and I respect the intentions of the member who brought it forward. None of us want to see young people drinking and driving; neither do we want to see anyone of any age drinking and driving. As many of you know, I used to teach at a high school, and I'm proud of that. I also know that as I taught, I certainly saw young people who were very responsible about drinking. In fact, I would venture to say: far more responsible than many of us of our age. [interjections] It's really scary when they agree with me. It must be the end of session.

I have seen these young people plan parties, plan Friday nights and look forward to a good time with their friends, and I have always seen them plan a designated driver. That is the norm. Years ago, when we used to hop in a car without thinking about putting on a seat belt, I think people would drink and then drive without really thinking about the implications, maybe because our roads weren't as busy, maybe because the traffic wasn't quite what it is now. I do believe that now we all hop in the car and automatically put on that seat belt. I would venture to say that the generation younger than us knows that when they drink, they do not drive, and they plan for someone to drive for them.

I find our young people very responsible. I also appreciate that if nothing else, bringing this bill to the Assembly will at least raise the awareness of drinking and driving particularly in this season, and not just for young people but for all people who have a drink on their way home from a Christmas party. It's time to change that type of behaviour and certainly lead by example.

I don't think this is realistic. I think it would create difficulties across the province. Most of our young people when they turn 18 are off to college, to a technical institution, to the university. You send your children off, and you expect that they will work hard at their studies. You expect that they will go to class. You expect that they will pay their tuition. Then you're going to legislate and say: oh, by the way, you can't drink until you're 19. I just find that a bit contradictory if we're going to say that at 18 you're old enough to leave home, to go to school, to be responsible, to go to further education, to vote. You are an adult in the eyes of the public. I guess with the initiation or the right of passage into adulthood also comes responsibility, and one of those responsibilities is responsible drinking.

I appreciate that this brings the issue forward. All of us, everyone in this Assembly, has lost someone or knows someone who was possibly killed because of an impaired driver or a death related to alcohol. Maybe the intent of this bill is to raise that awareness; however, I cannot support it. I feel that as we give our young people the title of adult at the age of 18, with all the rights and the responsibilities of life, included in those responsibilities is responsible drinking.

Thank you.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the Assembly this afternoon and offer my support for this legislative initiative. We will continue to hear throughout the discussion that this is about a freedom and a right, but I think the hon. member

introducing the bill talked about it as a privilege. Certainly the ability to use alcohol is something that we know is serious enough that we have to legislate certain rules and regulations around it, not the least of which is the age that consumption is acceptable, but also some of the rules around how one can use alcohol in a public place and, with respect to drinking and driving, how one should conduct oneself behind the wheel of a car, because the greater good of the community is at risk if those responsibilities are ignored.

4:40

I think I'd like to read into the record a few issues so that there is an understanding in the community about some of the implications of alcohol being used by our young people. I know some of the discussion is centring around what is a legal drinking age and the fact that our province maintains the age of 18 where other provinces in the country choose 19 and 21. I'm not so sure that this is something that we should be dealing with on a comparative basis or as if it's some sort of contest or that young people in certain provinces have more rights than others. Clearly, there was a recognition that alcohol should be made available to people who were old enough to vote and fight for their country, as has been raised, but I think it's appropriate that we also look at some of the health implications that are now available to us through research and give us pause to reconsider that particular scenario.

I am very concerned that rather than recognizing young people as being more responsible to drink by lowering the age of drinking, we should also look at some of the impacts of alcohol on them in their developmental years. The one that constantly comes to mind, of course, is the issue of drinking and driving and the implications of being behind the wheel of a car under the influence of alcohol. It's true that that's not tolerable for any age, for any driver, and under any circumstances, but we do seem to focus on the impact on young people. It's usually at that time that they are getting their licence for the first time, and they lack some of the experience of being on the road. So the combination of alcohol and their age and their newness to driving is certainly a factor that should be taken into consideration.

We also recognize that because our young people are developing physically, emotionally, and socially at that stage of their life, to introduce the influence of alcohol to them while they're making those judgment calls can present some risks to us. In fact, there is research that suggests that a young person doesn't physically develop to a full mature and adult age until they're maybe at least at age 24. I'm not suggesting that that should be the drinking age; I just wanted to read into the record that the age of a person and their own level of physical and emotional maturity may not all concur at the same time, and therefore the influence of alcohol plays a factor.

We would like physically and intellectually and healthy choices for our young people, and we also need a society that speaks about their health and their emotional health and their well-being in a congruent fashion. I find it interesting that we do expect many things of our young people. We look forward to them being successful in their studies, to make successful choices as they transfer into postsecondary programs. We want them to be full partners in the Alberta advantage, but sometimes we're a little bit shy and we hold back on really pointing out to them the implications of consuming alcohol at such a young age.

Mr. Speaker, may I say that it's not just a question of an 18 year old having access to alcohol. Clearly we know that there are young people who have access to alcohol on their high school campuses and unfortunately even as low as junior high. The fact of accessibility to alcohol and the way we allow that as a social norm doesn't just compromise the 18 year old or the 19 year old; it has serious

implications to our youth who are clearly, clearly immature in their ability not only to tolerate alcohol but make choices about what's good behaviour and what's appropriate for them.

I know when I talk to young people – and I appreciate the guests we have in the House this evening – that there is a very strong interest in being responsible about the use of alcohol and tobacco, as we debated earlier in this session. We as adults and as lawmakers have a responsibility to point out those hazards and take ownership for that. I don't have any problem at all with the youthfulness, the impulsiveness, and the wonderful gregarious natures that our young people demonstrate as they enjoy life, but I do believe that as legislators and as adults we have to take some responsibility for their health.

Mr. Speaker, I can say that as past chairman of AADAC one of the most distressing conversations I had was in a rural community where teachers were talking about some of their concerns of addictions in youth and the fact that in their communities the parents condone their young people drinking simply because it seemed like a rite of passage and a way of life. It was unfortunate, as these teachers mentioned, that each year their school yearbook had to put aside a number of pages to handle the tributes to those children who were killed on the highways of their local communities, most often because alcohol was a factor in their returning home in the evening in a vehicle where alcohol was accessible.

The connection that was made to me was that it's a very two-faced position that we as adults put out. We are concerned about youth, we are concerned about consumption of alcohol, we are concerned about driving and drinking, but in order to assert that authority and to recognize those responsibilities, we have to take ownership for ourselves. I think that sometimes it's very hard for parents and for society to come out and call a spade a spade and recognize that our youth are at risk because it means we, too, have to take ownership for our actions.

Another component that I would like to just draw on is the issue of binge drinking. Some of the research that has come out talks about the inability of a young person to handle alcohol appropriately, and binge drinking is one of those aspects that, the way they socialize and the way these events occur, can lead to a serious amount of alcoholic intake. We do know about situations where young people are killed on the roads because of alcohol, but I would encourage many of you to find out some of the statistics around the consumption of alcohol: alcohol poisoning, the hazing issues that we've seen in some of our campuses. I know of circumstances where young people as part of their birthday, an 18-year-old rite of passage – and I've witnessed this – are strapped into a chair in a local bar. They are duct-taped down, and shooters are thrown down their throat till the person is physically ill. There's no recognition of the health damage to that person. It's seen as something that should be done.

Mr. Speaker, to witness it is not a pleasant sight. I've seen it on a couple of occasions. I raise that in the House because it isn't just about drinking and driving; it is about the inability to recognize the impact of alcohol on our young people and the fact that we have a chance today to talk about the impact on our young people's health because of the consumption of alcohol. I think it's important to put it on the record. The two times I witnessed that, one was an 18 year old's birthday and the other was a stag for a young person in his early 20s getting married. My point is that this is not just about the age of 18; this is about a society that tolerates the inappropriate use of alcohol.

Another issue that I would focus on and that the police in our Calgary community have spoken about is the happy hour and the 25-cent drinks and the whole issue of being able to consume X number

of drinks in a minimum amount of time with the fewest amount of dollars, as if that were an appropriate way to bring in patrons into your bar or for young people to think that that's how adults socialize. With all due respect to our TV shows that promote a lifestyle of hanging around bars and having a good time, we miss the opportunity to have our young people know how many more rich opportunities there are in this world. So I would also like at this point to recognize that the issue of 25-cent shooters as a policy of any community is something that should also be looked at in the context of this particular piece of legislation.

We don't even have a chance to talk about the influence of alcohol in our schools and on our young people's education. We know about vandalism. We know about acting out. We know about breaking the law. What about the tragic loss of the opportunities to get educated and to move in our community and work in society? When you're under the influence of alcohol, or that seems to be the norm, we waste the opportunity to show our young people the whole potential of their future through the education system, through community volunteer work, and through other opportunities. I think that's an important element of the debate this afternoon.

I'd also like to reference the whole concern around fetal alcohol syndrome. Mr. Speaker, we're not worried only about youth who drive or their development or their ability to move into a mature adult education program, but the issue of substance abuse among teen pregnancies, the whole issue of the impact on that newborn child under development that the fetal alcohol programs that we are working on have identified as a serious concern. When the culture of our community tolerates alcohol abuse in our young people and calls it a right and a privilege and a freedom they should have but that very same society is looking at the socialization of young people with alcohol and with teen pregnancy being as significant as it is, the future of those young people (a) as mothers and (b) as their babies is something that we as legislators cannot ignore.

4:50

It's very difficult to turn around and draw the line in the sand that says at age X, Y, or Z you must behave this way. Quite frankly, we do it in many ways. We determine when you can vote, when you can drive. We also determine how one can associate. We tolerate or don't tolerate certain behaviours. I think there's enough evidence put forward through our health authorities, through research, through clinical studies, through the highway traffic safety issues that were mentioned earlier that we as legislators must look at what is the future for Alberta. What are our responsibilities? The fact that we have neighbouring jurisdictions that have changed their drinking age or recognized that 19 is an appropriate age given that that is most likely the completion year for high school I think is a serious issue that should be spoken about.

I appreciate that this is a private member's bill. We have opportunities following its passage to look at implementation strategies. I can assure you that the whole opportunity to do public awareness when you have a new piece of legislation can be a very, very significant component to the success and the effectiveness of the legislation.

I do applaud my colleague for bringing this forward at this time, and I'm pleased to offer my support. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am somewhat puzzled by the generality of the debate this afternoon, specifically with respect to the last speaker. I'm not disputing the fact that those types of incidents may, in fact, occur and most likely do occur involving

alcohol in this province, but I'm not particularly sure what relevance that has or what effect those instances have on the nature of this bill, which is really to adjust by one year the drinking age and gambling age from 18 to 19 years of age.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, if an individual doesn't have the judgment at 18 to determine how to responsibly drink or responsibly gamble, I highly doubt that a year will make any difference. We don't see any provisions in this bill that in that magic one-year window are going to provide some type of complementary or adjunct training or maturity counseling programs that would enable the judgment of 18 year olds to succeed to a higher level and therefore enable them to be in a better position to drink responsibly.

One of the remarks, though, that the last speaker did make was about societal attitudes towards drinking and gambling. I think that is a category that's worthy of debate this afternoon, not to say that this bill really has the ability to effect any change in that. I think, in fact, that the bill, with due respect to its sponsoring member, is really like putting a mini band-aid on a gaping wound. If all we are prepared to do in this province is adjust the age by one year and meanwhile allow the absolute, unrestricted proliferation of VLTs and gambling casinos all across the province because this government has an acute need for the revenues those casinos and VLTs bring in, Mr. Speaker, I mean, really, what is the point? What kind of change will a one-year adjustment in the drinking age effect when we have communities, small towns, regional centres, and large cities in this province where you can almost go to any street corner and find a VLT machine or a casino? I'm hoping that perhaps the Minister of Gaming will rise to his feet this afternoon if he's recovered from the vigor of debate last evening and provide some perspective and analysis on this bill.

The reality is that we can have 18 year olds that are enrolled in the military. They will be able to drive. They can marry. They can be put in prisons. They can be sued. They can start their own business. They can enter into contracts. How do you think an 18 year old is going to respond if the governors of the land indicate: well, apart from your being able to do all of those things, you're not legally going to be able to drink until you're 19 years of age? The initiatives aren't aligned.

Again, I'm sure the hon. member sponsoring this bill this afternoon is very well intentioned; I don't have any doubts about that. There is a bigger issue, a bigger dynamic at play, a bigger reality that this bill will have marginal if any impact in addressing.

The bill reminds me in a way of the punitive approach we've seen in legislation from particularly this government, punitive in that if we have a problem, what we're going to do is legislate a punishment or take away a right versus address what's behind that problem or the cause of that problem. The bill just passed this afternoon surrounding youth smoking: in my remarks on that particular bill I talked about the fact that the last thing police need in this province is the additional workload of having to go around and issue fines to young people who may very well have the complete consent of their parents to smoke. This bill puts another burden on police officers because here again we would be proposing that people be fined, I'm assuming, if they chose to drink between the ages of 18 and 19. I didn't hear the hon. member who sponsored the bill indicate whether he had any support from the police or that sector. I'm suspecting that he most likely does not. I certainly have not heard any support voiced from the RCMP or from city police with regard to this bill. I think it's a matter, Mr. Speaker, where there are much, much more important issues that citizens and police officers would like this province to address if we could demonstrate the wherewithal to do that.

The fact of the matter is, however, that the bill is before us this

afternoon, and it will be unquestionably put to debate. It sort of in some ways reminds me of the proposal that was made by the Minister of Infrastructure about how to avoid wearing down the roads in Alberta and the solution was just drive on the other side. Well, in this case the bill proposes that the way to deal with the social problems relative to drinking and gambling is just to extend the legal age for partaking in those activities by one year. It fits in the same sort of ludicrous context, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that we need to have within our society a framework that supports parents, community agencies, schools, and all others that come in contact with young people, to support them in providing the mentorship and the examples that lead to responsible drinking and, if I can say it, responsible gambling. I'm not sure there is responsible gambling. But in any event, as has been discussed many times, I think we have a paltry number of programs in the province that actually seek and work to support the healthy early development of children in this province.

5:00

We've seen cuts occur in those areas. We've seen a bit of a patchwork approach to the provision of those services. We've seen regionalization of the administrative boards in both child welfare and the health sector, which unquestionably in the end is costing taxpayers more money simply for paying for administration when really those dollars, Mr. Speaker, could be quite effectively funneled into programs that would make a meaningful difference and address the root issue the hon. member is trying to address this afternoon in Bill 212.

We didn't talk about the relationship between some of these activities and violence and the fact that Alberta has, I think, one of the highest – if I'm wrong, I'm sure I'll be corrected – incidences of family violence in the country and, again, one of the highest incidences of firearms being involved in domestic altercations in the country. Very often, as well, in that violent equation, drinking or the stresses of gambling can play a part in perpetuating that volatile environment. Regrettably, Bill 212 is just not going to provide the types of initiatives that are going to address the magnitude of those problems and issues.

We have seen the government take some action with respect to fetal alcohol syndrome. We have seen the government take some action, although certainly not to the extent that perhaps they should have, with respect to family violence. Again it comes down to: I would much rather have crisis intervention teams, police officers being able to focus their time on addressing and intervening in situations of family violence than hanging out around school grounds, the local casinos, or bars to monitor and potentially fine the small segment of people who might fall within that 18 to 19 year category, Mr. Speaker. There are just so many more priorities we could be looking at and addressing if the government's focus was in the right direction.

So in this respect, Mr. Speaker, I'll be voting against the motion this afternoon. I don't believe really too much more debate is required, and I look forward to other comments on the bill.

Thank you.

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

MRS. LAIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 212, and although I see the merits of the bill, I cannot support it. I am pleased that this bill seeks to reduce illegal drinking among our youth as well as drunk driving, which kills many people on our roads each year. I also appreciate the initiative of the hon. Member for Little Bow to enhance and protect the lives of our youth. However,

I do not feel this is the solution to the complex problem of alcohol use and abuse by youth.

Mr. Speaker, I see this bill as an attempt to correct a very complex problem. However, I feel that the method as proposed by Bill 212 may not be suitable in dealing with the illegal use of alcohol. This problem is much deeper than appears on the surface. There is a whole plethora of social, physical, and even religious influences that have a strong bearing on this situation and must be taken into consideration.

I have several arguments as to why this type of legislation would likely be ineffective. I am proud of the generally responsible use of alcohol by our youth today. Perhaps in contradiction to some groups, I am confident that many young people are diligent in monitoring their alcohol consumption and ensuring that they get home safely. I feel this bill tends to assume that most everyone else does not use alcohol responsibly. [interjections] Excuse me.

You might be surprised to know there actually has been a decrease in the use of alcohol. In fact, research has found that in the 10-year period of 1985 to 1994 there was a 22 percent decrease in the amount of alcohol purchased by individuals older than 15 years of age. Two conclusions can be drawn from this: it indicates a waning interest in alcohol, and our society is becoming more health conscious.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of the campaigns attempting to convince alcohol consumers to designate a driver if they plan on drinking. Young people in particular seem to be getting the message that it's simply not acceptable to drink and drive. In many youth circles it's felt that driving drunk is a social faux pas and could affect an individual's position among their peers. This is continuing evidence that there's an increase of public awareness regarding responsible use of alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, raising the legal drinking age would punish the responsible majority for the irresponsible actions of a minority. Why should we revoke the privilege of the majority as a result of a problem that would exist whether the legal drinking age is raised or not? The government of Alberta is seeking to reduce its influence in the lives of citizens of this province, and I feel this bill would tend to counteract those efforts, because we need to affirm the ability of individuals to manage their own lives and make responsible decisions.

It's also necessary to look at human nature in order to see that this type of legislation will be counterproductive. I'm sure that most everyone, particularly youth, are mesmerized by signs which read "No Fishing" or "No Trespassing" or "Authorized Personnel Only." If young people are anything like most of us, they probably ask: what's so special about the area that I have to be authorized in order to be in there? If there's no sign up that forbids entry, most people would likely not entertain even a second thought about entering. This phenomena has often been called the lure of the forbidden fruit, the concept that something forbidden looks twice as attractive as those which are open.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I propose that the occurrence of this type of situation will increase if we raise the current drinking age of 18 to 19. We will send a message to youth that will shroud alcohol consumption in mystery and thus increase the desire of youth to have contact with it.

Madam Speaker, in the past several years there's been a push in our society to be as just and fair as possible, and one of the ways we can ensure this occurs is to make the drinking age consistent with the age of majority. At the age of 18 the rights to vote, marry, pay taxes, take out loans, and defend our country are conferred on

individuals. It would be inconsistent and discriminatory should we refuse to confer the right to consume alcohol on 18 year olds, choosing instead to raise the legal drinking age to 19 or perhaps 21. This would send mixed messages about when a person becomes an adult and their ability to make certain decisions but not others.

Another key aspect regarding consistency is that there are advocates who want to confer adult status on young offenders over 16. However, these same people favour raising the legal drinking age to 19. This is confusing. When do we believe that a person becomes an adult? Is it when they've committed a serious crime, or is it when they're able to vote or consume alcohol? Madam Speaker, I would ask this Assembly to consider this point when making its decision on whether or not to support this bill.

There is also a different aspect to the consistency argument that involves current illegal activities. If we carefully study the actual intentions of Bill 212, we discover the bill is actually duplicating current legislation. Bill 212 wants to curb impaired driving, which is already illegal. In addition, the bill also wants to reduce consumption of alcohol by underage youth, which is also illegal. I am convinced this government seeks to be as efficient as it can in whatever way possible, and I propose that this bill would simply reduce the efficiency of current legislation as it is essentially a duplication. We do not need more legislation; we simply need better enforcement of legislation that is already in place.

5:10

I question also whether this bill is the best and most productive way of removing the influence of alcohol from high school youth and reducing alcohol-related traffic accidents involving 18 year olds. It's common knowledge that underage youth are going to drink whether or not there's a law that prohibits it, thus I'm not sure this bill will help to reduce the use of alcohol among youth. According to a study done by AADAC, an increase in the legal drinking age actually had the opposite effect of that which was intended. When the legal drinking age has been raised, there are reports of significant increases in illegal drinking and heavy alcohol use among the underaged; again, the forbidden fruit.

Madam Speaker, there is also research evidence that stricter alcohol consumption rules and an increased legal drinking age contributed to increased alcohol consumption by students. This is believed to be caused by the tendency for students to drink behind closed doors, in cars, and in unsupervised situations. This is dangerous, because if the students are without supervision, there is more of a chance for problems to occur. A medical problem like alcohol poisoning or an allergic reaction could occur without help being available. Students could also be afraid to get help because of the consequences they would fear facing by having consumed alcohol as a minor. This suppressed situation would also contribute to the development of unhealthy drinking habits. When individuals are with a group of their peers, they generally lack an understanding of moderation. As a result, they develop binge drinking tendencies, which has also been discussed by my colleague for Calgary-Currie.

I believe this bill will contribute to an increasing number of individuals that come into unnecessary conflict with the law. If young people are going to drink anyway and we raise the legal drinking age to 19, this creates a whole new group of young people who would have a record of illegal activities.

I lived in the era when it was 21, and I'll tell you the number of illegal drinking activities was far greater than what it is today. I think the youth of today have a far better understanding of the situation.

According to the same studies I mentioned earlier by AADAC, an increase in the legal drinking age also increased other illegal

activities such as procuring and using false ID so they can buy liquor. This comes from the result of young people, who are eager to enter into the world that they feel is grown-up, believing that going to the bars is a sign of maturity.

I'm also opposed to any type of regulation of alcohol consumption. I'd like to suggest that there are other alternatives to the bill. I believe the alternatives could be instrumental in changing unhealthy attitudes towards alcohol. There would be a significant rise in justice costs to enforce this change in the drinking age. Perhaps extra funding can be put into alcohol use and abuse education programs such as AADAC runs. These programs would be used to further educate youth about the dangers of binge drinking and driving drunk.

Madam Speaker, I am as interested as the Member for Little Bow to encourage the responsible use of alcohol by youth and adults, and this bill is an excellent vehicle for raising awareness and encouraging discussion. However, I'm inclined to disagree with the manner in which the bill attempts to reach its end. I believe there are better ways, and I hope my speech has planted a few seeds in the minds of those who are listening to think of the way we can proactively work together for the solution.

I thank the Member for Little Bow for bringing this forward.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and speak to Bill 212, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act. I would first of all like to express my support for this bill and recognize its positive contributions. I would also like to commend the Member for Little Bow for reviving this act. My support and commendation are due to the fact that this bill deals with the very pressing issue concerning the valued youth of this province.

Madam Speaker, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act intends to raise the legal drinking age from 18 to 19 years of age. There are several very good reasons for such an action, the first being an obvious attempt to curb excessive drinking among high school students. I feel it is important to note that alcohol use by 15 to 19 year olds in Alberta at 76 percent is significantly higher than the national average of 72 percent. I must also note that some of the people included in these statistics are not even of legal drinking age.

We need to think about where these young adults are getting the liquor they are consuming. Obviously, it would be most often from those students who are 18 years of age, able to buy liquor, and at the same parties or functions as younger teens.

This bill would also contribute to reducing the amount of taxpayers' money being spent on addressing alcohol-related addictions and other problems. Madam Speaker, the members of this Assembly might be surprised to note that alcohol use and abuse in Alberta costs our citizens \$285 per person, while the national average is \$265 per person. However, it should not surprise us that this also occurs in a province with the least stringent drinking laws. Simply as a result of raising the drinking age, we could decrease the number of people needing treatment and thus reduce the individual Albertan's expenditure, and I can see my comments are being taken seriously by the attention I'm getting from the front bench immediately before me.

The final contribution of this bill, and perhaps one of the most important, is that it would assist in reducing the number of alcohol-related deaths on Alberta's highways. Statistics show that the highest number of these deaths on our roads is being caused by alcohol consumers in their late teens. These statistics, released by Alberta transportation and utilities, indicate that drivers between the ages of 18 and 19 were more likely to have consumed alcohol before

a fatal collision than any other group. If we look at the age of 20 to 21 year olds, there is a marked decrease in these accidents, but the number is still quite high.

Madam Speaker, with the use . . .

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Excuse me, hon. member, but I'm going to ask the front bench if they will turn around and face this way so you can address the chair. Thank you. You don't have the opportunity to do likewise to them, so I'd ask that they turn around.

Debate Continued

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Madam Speaker, with the use and acceptance of alcohol in high schools, the present low legal drinking age contributes to making drinking a regular activity at the high school level. The danger with this is that youths may end up carrying this message into their adult lives and believe that everyday life and alcohol use are indivisible. If the legal drinking age is changed to 19, alcohol would be completely unacceptable at school social functions and would act to prevent youths from shaping this dangerous belief. Younger teens would also have less of an opportunity to access alcohol, thus preventing the development of this belief at an even earlier age.

School jurisdictions across Canada have experienced a greater incidence of disciplinary problems in recent years involving more serious issues such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and violence between students in organized gangs.

Increasingly, schools have found that traditional forms of disciplinary enforcement have been less effective and have looked to new methods of dealing with these problems, including codes of conduct or an increased security presence on campus. Alberta schools have also experienced a similar increase in violence in recent years and have relied on several different ways of dealing with it. Access to alcohol among high school age youth is a contributing factor to these problems.

In the spring session of 1998 the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti introduced Bill 227, the School (Principal's Duties) Amendment Act, to deal with school violence and drug or alcohol abuse. The bill would have amended section 15 of the School Act, responsibility of principals, so that in cases of suspected illegal activity such as physical violence, sexual assault, misconduct, harassment, vandalism, possession of weapons or narcotics, a principal would have to contact the local police service and school superintendent as soon as possible.

However, this bill died on the Order Paper when the 1998 session ended, and in the spring session of 1999 the then minister of education, Gary Mar, introduced Bill 20, the School Amendment Act. Bill 20 added several sections to the current act to ensure increased safety in schools, including a clarification of the reasons and procedures to suspend or expel students from school for behaviour threatening to the well-being of others. Under section 19 of the new act, a student can be suspended specifically if "the student's conduct is injurious to the physical or mental well-being of others in the school."

These are beneficial initiatives, Madam Speaker, but they do not address the accessibility of alcohol in schools which is a contributing factor to school violence and other problems. By raising the legal drinking age, this government would go a long way to reducing access to alcohol for young people.

I'm not arguing that this is the only solution, but it is a major one, and without it our young people will continue to receive the

contradictory message that they can't drink but their 18-year-old peers who are also still in school can. If we really wanted to send a consistent message to our young people about the negative effects of alcohol use and abuse, we would protect all school children from the influence of alcohol and access to it by raising the legal drinking age.

5:20

Madam Speaker, this bill would also deal with major health care issues which are very important to those who are in their late teens. At the age of 18, which is the present legal age to drink, youth are still developing mentally and physically and socially. It is a proven fact that alcohol plays a significant role in inhibiting their normal development. Alcohol is also a drug that can affect the learning capacity of its users. Because alcohol adversely affects the way the body stores vitamins and minerals, its use can lead to poor academic performance or learning difficulties. Alcohol also suppresses hormones vital to the development of muscles and bones. Since 18 year olds are still growing, alcohol can actually reduce the height of its users.

Perhaps the greatest health concern is the possibility of addiction. Youth are often oblivious to excesses of any kind and may be unable to judge when enough is enough. Unfortunately, these young people can become addicted to this drug before they, or anyone else for that matter, are aware of it.

Madam Speaker, before closing, I believe it is necessary to answer several possible objections to this bill. There may be opposition based on the argument that this bill is just another way for the government to control our lives. I would direct the proponents of this position to note that the government is already too involved in people's lives through funding rehabilitation clinics and programs for youths and adults who are addicted to drugs and alcohol. By the time this intervention occurs, it is too late. Young adults who seek some type of rehabilitation have suffered, are suffering, and will continue to suffer as a result of their unfortunate circumstances. This bill would not increase the amount of government intervention; it would simply shift the point of intervention to a sooner, more productive point in time.

Through this bill I also believe we have an excellent opportunity to help our young people avoid unnecessary pain and hardship. Those young adults who are already addicted to any kind of substance have suffered more than anyone should. This bill gives an otherwise cold and faceless institution an opportunity to say we care about what happens to our children and their friends by preventing situations before they happen. This bill helps us send a message to our children that life is not just one big party devoid of seriousness or consequences. Our children must understand that one of the keys to really living is knowing about and believing in the responsibilities we have to ourselves and, more importantly, those around us.

An increase in the drinking age would allow youth and kids to understand that alcohol use is a serious matter and one pressure we as a government say they don't have to deal with when in high school. Madam Speaker, I am not saying that we will effectively eradicate all alcohol use or addiction, but we do have the opportunity to reach at least one person. That one person could mean a Christmas without grief for a family or a life without a criminal record. If the bill were to do this even for just one person, our efforts would be rewarded.

In closing, I want to help members of this Assembly and the citizens of this province understand that this bill is not intended to punish young people but to help them. There are many difficult decisions to make in teenage years which are complicated by peer pressure and insecurity. We have an opportunity to guide our youth away from possible dangers, to relieve them of some of the challenges they already face as young adults, and enable them to lead satisfied, thoughtful, safe, and balanced lives. One year can go a

long way to helping our young people make the best choices for their future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to get in a few comments on the debate on this bill, and I've listened to it very closely this afternoon on both sides. I have to admit that I'm supportive of the bill, of moving the drinking age up by one year; however, my preference would have been to move it up to age 21.

I don't say that lightly and without a lot of thought. I do believe that one year is a step forward, but it isn't the final step. I don't say that – it's probably not a very popular view to make that recommendation or suggestion. But sometimes I sit and watch teenagers around my household who are 15, 16, and 17 years of age, and I really have to say they're all different sizes and shapes. They're all at different maturity levels. The most difficulty they have is making the choice to say no. Some of them have the maturity to do that and others do not. I think it's a fallacy to expect that young people at that age have the maturity level to stand up and be tall and say: I don't want to participate.

Now, whether we're putting a lot of pressure on them in a number of areas, I can't comment on that. As I say, I have some in the house that are six foot five and others that are five foot four. They are all different sizes from maybe 105 pounds to 225. Some of them are athletes, some of them are not. Some are A students, some are C students, and there are quite a lot of them who come to our home. But I do know that when they go outside that door and they're age 16 and they get in that car and drive off, as a parent you lose control; you lose the ability to know what influence is there with them.

About two weeks ago at the end of our street – today there are crosses and flowers – there were two 18-year-old kids killed, not through any fault of their own but because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time and someone came through the red light and sliced a car in half. My husband and I came upon the accident minutes after it had happened. Two kids are dead and another one is in hospital with just about every bone in their little body shattered. When you see that, you realize you are sending children out and expecting an awful lot from them. We're expecting them to be able

to ward off influence, make the right choices. I don't know; as a mother, it's the worst fear of your life when that child goes out that door because you don't know what they're going to run into.

This week my son's social studies project was on drinking and driving, and I said: why did you do this project? The kids in the neighbourhood are pretty emotional, naturally, about the two that were killed, and they started to talk about the reasons. One of the things we talked about on drinking and driving – because he is 16 years of age and has a new driver's licence – was the fact that everybody does it. Well, when you have the answer that everybody does it, then you know we are not in a position to say: this is wrong, and I'm making the choice to back away from it.

So I think if we, Madam Speaker, can put some tough rules around this – I don't know why we lowered it. I've heard the argument about the military and the vote and all that, but I also heard that years ago. I haven't heard anything new. I still don't know why we lowered it to 18. We did that in time for me to be 18 and be able to go to the bar. I don't know if it was a big advantage or disadvantage. I can't remember, quite frankly, because I'm too old now to remember that far back. But I do know that kids will try and do it illegally anyway. If we can put some walls around that and some certainty so they can, in fact, say, "I can't get into the bar; I can't go there," maybe, just maybe we can help save one life or two lives or three lives so that kids stay away from it.

I know there are others who want to get in on this and clearly we're running out of time, but I wanted to be on the record to say that I will support this bill. I wish it was going a little further, because I do believe the age 21 is far more appropriate for this type of bill and consumption. I did support the earlier bill today. I also think it could have gone a little further.

I believe if we give our children a framework they can operate within, we give them a better chance, Madam Speaker. I know you're standing up because the time is running out, so I will take my place.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

Under Standing Order 41 the Assembly stands adjourned until 8 this evening.

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

