

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 2, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/03/02

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Though we as legislators of this great province and its people are taken from the common people and selected by You to be architects of our history, give us wisdom and understanding to do Your will in all we do. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand here with great pride today to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly two very special guests who are sitting in the Speaker's gallery this afternoon. They are Ray Martin, former MLA and former Leader of the Official Opposition in this House, and his wife, Cheryl Matheson. I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today it is my pleasure to present a petition signed by 108 individuals from Calgary who state:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition to present to the Assembly that states:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

That was signed by 135 Calgarians.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon on behalf of 117 citizens from Calgary to submit a petition asking the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining" the public health care system.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise on this sad day in the Legislature to table 131 petitions signed by Calgarians urging the Legislative Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure this afternoon to rise and present a petition which requests the

Legislative Assembly "to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." They are from 127 Calgarians. That brings the total today, once all of the presenters have presented, to 1,141 individuals.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition on behalf of 640 Albertans primarily from the constituency of Edmonton-Glengarry urging the government to "stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care." Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to table today a petition signed by 235 Albertans, and this brings the total number of signatories to 1,350. The petitioners are calling on this Assembly "to pass a Bill banning private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MR. MacDONALD: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to have the 1,000-signature petition that I presented to the Assembly yesterday read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. NICOL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would rise to request that the petition I presented yesterday now be read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday concerning public health care and the concern about it being undermined by this government be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government of Alberta to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I tabled yesterday be read and received now.

THE CLERK:

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

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday on behalf of the hon. Member for Stony Plain be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, to urge the Government to intervene on the parents' behalf to have the Parkland School Division No. 70 review and reconsider the decision to amalgamate the French Immersion program.

head: Notices of Motions

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to give notice right now that I will be bringing an application for a declaration. There has been a contempt of this Legislative Assembly. This, sir, relates to what happened at noon today when the Leader of the Official Opposition was denied access to a private briefing with respect to a bill that had been given notice on the Order Paper and that had not yet received first reading. In fact, the Leader of the Official Opposition was physically restrained, physically assaulted . . .

THE SPEAKER: You're giving notice.

MR. DICKSON: Very well, sir. I'll deal with it later.
Thank you.

head: Introduction of Bills

Bill 11 Health Care Protection Act

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I am very pleased to be able to introduce a bill being the Health Care Protection Act, 2000.

This proposed legislation, which is a very important item, is designed to provide protection to the public health care system of this province by filling a legislative gap, to put into law our commitment as a government to the adherence to the principles of the Canada Health Act, and further, Mr. Speaker, to put in place the proper legislative structure to regulate and control and of course prohibit private hospitals. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members had better retain their places when the Speaker is in the chair and he's standing; otherwise, there will be a contempt.

[Motion carried; Bill 11 read a first time]

1:40

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to table with the Assembly the required number of copies of Alberta Infrastructure's three-year primary highway construction and

rehabilitation program, including the north/south trade corridor projects, covering the years 2000, 2001-02, and 2003.

Now, Mr. Speaker, also included are copies of the secondary highway construction and rehab program and construction of public roads and bridges for the years 2000-2001 to '01-02, and the proposed 2000-2001 estimates for seniors' lodges, health care facilities, and water management infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, each MLA will be receiving information related to the project listed that applies to their individual constituency with respect to the listing of primary and secondary highway projects. Those MLAs whose constituencies are within a city will receive information relating to the entire city.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today with the appropriate number of copies. First, from Andre and Myra Morin from the city of St. Albert, who are opposed to and disagree with the proposal to expand private health care, and, secondly, from Dorothy Barclay from Spruce Grove, who likewise is very, very much opposed to what the government is doing in allowing overnight stays.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have three tablings. The first is from Sakaw school, from the chairperson on behalf of the parent council in my riding, who is very concerned about the underfunding of education, in particular classroom sizes. I will be reading the contents of this letter into the record later on in budget debate.

The second tabling is a letter to the Premier from Roland Teape, who is very concerned about what's happening in Environment and makes some recommendations for the Premier with regard to the Minister of Environment.

The third tabling is copies of petitions signed by 102 people who live in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan. Mr. Speaker, these people are very concerned about gas wells that are going into the area that they live in, and they are equally concerned that their MLA was not prepared to table this petition in the Legislature.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table a letter of invitation from the minister of health to attend a briefing on Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act, today over the noon hour, the same briefing that I was physically stopped from entering.

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Point of order.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Actually, hon. members, it being Thursday, Thursday always seems to be that day before a weekend, and sometimes there's some youthful exuberance displayed by hon. members in the Assembly, but let's get on with the Routine.

The chair has recognized the hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today. The first one is entitled The Fifth National Court Technology Conference, September '97, the Technology-augmented Court Record.

The second one is entitled Making the Record: Court Reporting and Technology, An Analysis of the Issues, March 4, 1992.

The third one is Depositions and Accuracy: A Report of The Justice Research Institute.

The fourth one, Mr. Speaker, is also in relation to digital audio recording: information on suitability for use in courtrooms. It was compiled by LegalVoice, Inc. in New Jersey, again a report on digital court communication.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table five copies of a letter from a concerned Albertan — and it's addressed to the Environment minister — stating her opposition to the Natural Heritage Act.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and table five copies of *Clear Answers: The Economics and Politics of For-Profit Medicine* by Kevin Taft and Gillian Steward. The book holds the truth about this government's deceptive mismanagement of the public health care system.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today. These are further to comments that I was making during the Community Development debates on Tuesday. The first set of tablings is copies of letters from Robert Bardston of Medicine Hat, Cheryl Cooney of Red Deer, and Laurie Leier and John Pauls, both of Calgary, who have written to their MLAs urging the government to increase funding to the arts by \$8 million.

The second set of tablings — and this is further to a discussion on women's policy and programs. I'm providing the front page and the masthead page of three publications by *Canadian Woman Studies*: Women and Education, Women in Science and Technology, and Immigrant and Refugee Women.

My final tabling is five copies of over 50 cards signed and collected by members of the Edmonton Raging Grannies. They are asking to save medicare and health care for people, not for profit.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two letters to table today. These people specifically phoned and asked me to table these in the Legislature. Though I have several more, these two phoned this week and said: please table it this week. They are from Valerie Braiden in St. Albert and Mrs. Cindy Milton in Spruce Grove. They are expressing their concerns about private, for-profit health care and the direction this government is taking.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got 11 different

tablings to make today, and with your permission I'd like to put the names of the writers of the letters on record. The first one is a letter from William and Cathy Reid and family of Cochrane.

The second one is from Jim Culver of Lethbridge. The third one is from C.H. Dyke, a retired person from Calgary. The fourth one is from Colleen and Lou Lindblad. The fifth one is from Doug and Janet Friebe of Edmonton. The sixth one is from Joan Bowes from Sherwood Park. The seventh one from Mary Trumpener from Edmonton. The next one is from Joanne Clelland from Edmonton as well. The next one, Mr. Speaker, is from Thea Paap from Edmonton. The second last one is from Peace River and is from Terry Dashcavich. The last one, Mr. Speaker, is from Evelyn Henderson from Edmonton. They are appalled at the decision of this government to bring in private, for-profit hospitals in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several tablings with your permission, and I'll go as quickly as I can. I have, first of all, the appropriate number of copies of a letter from my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Meadowlark to the Minister of Health and Wellness dated today requesting that the minister not just investigate the Gimbel Eye Centre for a potential breach of law concerning queue-jumping but that the investigation be expanded to other private eye clinics, not only in Calgary but in Edmonton, and also to initiate the investigation in regard to MRI clinics.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have copies of correspondence, first addressed to the Premier from Mr. Floyd Haynes requesting that he do nothing to jeopardize Alberta's precious public health care system, and a similar letter to the Minister of Health and Wellness from Mr. Floyd Haynes, in my constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I have copies of the executive summary and of the entire text of a very informative report that was released to day by Dr. Richard Plain, a PhD in economics. The title is An Economic Overview from a Public Interest Perspective: The Privatization and the Commercialization of Public Hospital Based Medical Services Within the Province of Alberta. That's the title. Basically he finds a flaw with the notion that somehow the public good can be served by privatization of our health care system.

1:50

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The first one is to the Hon. Halvar Jonson, Minister of Health and Wellness, dated February 29th: "On a daily basis my colleagues and I receive phone calls, faxes and e-mails regarding the Twelve Principles of the Alberta Approach to health care."

The second one, Mr. Speaker, is the appropriate number of copies of a letter sent to the Hon. Allan Rock, Minister of Health for Canada: "On a daily basis, my colleagues and I receive phone calls, faxes and e-mails regarding the Twelve Principles of the Alberta Approach to health care." This is dated February 29 from our Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your indulgence I have here 2,500 cards signed by Albertans calling on the Premier to

stop the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals. There are too many cards to table five copies of each. I would like to send the 2,500 cards across the way to the Premier's desk.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I have three tablings today. The first is from a resident of Alberta from Red Deer-North, and he's concerned about the Genesis land development in the Spray Valley region. He calls the development a "monstrosity," and he urges "you," being the department, "to recommend that this area be added to the present Peter Lougheed Provincial Park."

The second tabling is from Dr. Peter Petrik of the city of Edmonton, and he wishes to express his profound concern regarding the Genesis proposal of development for major recreation facilities in Spray Valley.

The third is from a long-time resident, actually born and raised in Banff, and she now lives in Kanata, Ontario. She expresses concern about the proposal of Genesis Land Development for a four-season development complex and heli/cat ski operation at the head of Spray Lakes in Kananaskis valley. She's not categorically against the parks development per se but just very concerned about limiting the goal of this development and the scope of this development.

Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Aboriginal Affairs.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm very, very pleased to introduce to you and to the Members of the Legislative Assembly some very excited young individuals. They're from my constituency of Lesser Slave Lake, from High Prairie, from St. Andrew's school. It's rare that we see schools come to the Legislature, because it's so far away, but I'm excited that they're here today, and I know they are. They are in the members' gallery. There are 47 visitors. The teachers that accompany these young people are Terry Smith and Leanne Kowalchuk and parent helpers Mary Lou McCue, Tina Kennedy, Cathy Hewko, Mary Wakaluk, Anna Belyan, Lucy Dufour, Verna Wittigo, Diane Perry, John Zahara, and Hanna Harasymchuk, from Ukraine. There are 35 students. I ask all of the people from High Prairie, St. Andrew's, to stand up and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly 50 individuals from the School of Hope. The School of Hope is a virtual and blended program and is also connected to the Vermilion home school program. They are part and parcel of 2,400 students across this province from all the constituencies in the province of Alberta. They have come here today with hope, I guess, that we would demonstrate to them good conduct in the demonstration of democracy, and I trust that we learn something from the name of their school.

I'd also like to introduce with the students some of their teachers: Mrs. Helen Prediger, Mrs. Lorraine Person, and Mrs. Monica Poland. With them also are parents and helpers Mrs. Laura Haeberle, Mrs. Irene Nichol, Mrs. Debbie Farkash, Mr. Brent Clark and Mrs. Camille Clark, Mrs. Bonnie Dyck, and Mr. and Mrs. Frans Feyter. They are also accompanied by Mr. Sylvestro Chiacchia and

Mrs. Harvena Chiacchia and Mr. Bruce Jackson. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a visiting family from St. Paul. The family does home schooling. The parents are Mr. and Mrs. Ken and Paulette Ralstin, and they have with them their four children: Sara, Jeremy, Jason, and Natalie. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would like to ask them to stand and be welcomed by the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce a public school board trustee with the Fort McMurray school district, Mr. Glenn Doonanco. He's joined here today with his lovely wife, Louise, and their children, Danielle and Chantel. They're in the members' gallery. I'd like to ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of all the legislators here today.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very delighted and pleased today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly seven Cub Scouts from the 97th Dunluce Cubs from the constituency of Edmonton-Castle Downs. They are here today to witness what's happening and transpiring in the Legislative Assembly. They are here with their leader, Mrs. Tammy Kucy. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of Highwood, Andrea Fugeman Miller. She has served as the co-chair of Windsong regional child and family services authority. Andrea is located in the members' gallery. I ask her now to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several guests today. First of all, I'd like to introduce two gentlemen that I've only just recently met. I believe that they're seated in the members' gallery. Mr. Peter Labant from St. Paul, with Intercontinental Granite, is visiting us today, and Mr. David Wall from here in the city with Aircom Industries is also here. They've made it into the public gallery. They're already standing, so I'd ask all members to join me in welcoming them.

Mr. Speaker, also seated — and this time I know they're in the members' gallery because I can feel their look, and they're here on some serious business today. I'd like to introduce Bernice and Gerry Cassady. They're visiting from my constituency. They are keen observers of politics. They give me sage advice, and they're here to help hold the government accountable for its privatization of health care. I'd ask them to stand and be recognized.

Sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Cassady, Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce through you and to all members of the Assembly Mr.

Kevan Rhead, who from time to time will call me with some sharp reminders of what my obligations are in terms of serving the public interest. I'd ask him to stand and also receive the warm welcome from all members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, one final set of guests that are here today: Des and Helen Achilles, who are no strangers to any member, I don't believe, of this Assembly. They make their views known on a whole variety of issues. They are here today as well to join with many Albertans in making sure that this government doesn't push ahead with its privatization of health care plans. I would ask Des and Helen to please rise and receive the very warm welcome of this Chamber.

2:00

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have several guests to introduce today. I was going to introduce them all at once, but one person will be introduced after the first group is introduced, and you and my colleagues will know why that is the case in a moment.

All of these people that I'm going to introduce are opposed to the legalization of private, for-profit hospitals. They are Pritam Khullar; Shirley Edgar; Judith Golec; Irene Payne; Dr. Eugene Falkenberg; Margaret Falkenberg, both from Lethbridge; Brian Staples; Clare Botsford; Arlene Chapman, who is one of the six very high quality candidates running for the nomination in Edmonton-Highlands for the New Democrats; Lawrence Johnson, also a candidate for nomination in Highlands; Deanna Shorten and Regina Parker, with Poverty in Action; Doug Tomlinson; Evelyn Tomlinson; and Hana Razga, who is the constituency office manager for Edmonton-Highlands. I'll ask all of these individuals to stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction is of a person that has been my companion for the last 40 years. That happens to be my wife, Swinder Pannu. Swinder and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary on the 28th of February. I'll ask her to now stand and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very special day for me. A number of guests have arrived and are in the gallery, so with your indulgence I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly, first of all, Julie Lloyd. Julie is a constituent and a lawyer and has been heading up the very good work of Equal=Alberta. I'm proud to count Julie as a friend as well. If I could ask Julie to please rise and accept the welcome of the House.

Secondly, I am always pleased when members of the arts community join us in question period, and I am really delighted that Ron Jenkins has joined us in the public gallery today. Ron is an actor and a director in Edmonton, a very innovative fellow, known for his gritty pieces and realistic presentations, and some will no doubt remember the plays that he did in an autobody shop and a back alley. Ron is the newly appointed artistic director of Workshop West theatre. Congratulations, Ron. I'd ask you to please rise and accept the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

I just have two more sets. There are two constituents who have come today to express their concerns about private health care. Roger Wowk is a frequent caller and dispenser of advice to myself and the constituency staff, and we appreciate his interest and his guidance. Joan Dobek is a very active senior in the constituency and gathered a number of signatures on the health care petitions. Now, I'm not sure which gallery they're in or indeed if they're here now

or will be shortly, but if they are, would they please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

Finally, I'd like to introduce Dr. Phil Kreisel. Dr. Kreisel is an entrepreneur and the owner of Matrix Research, and I'm sure many remember his father, Henry Kreisel. With Dr. Kreisel is Joanne Janzen, and that's the marvelous Joanne who runs my office and makes it all happen. I'd ask them to both please rise and accept the warm welcome of the House.

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to this Assembly an ex-Edmontonian whom I know many in this House would know and who is now living in Calgary and is a constituent of mine in Calgary-West. Ron Liepert is in the members' gallery. Would Ron please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to introduce some parents from the l'ecole Meridian Heights school in Stony Plain. Their presence here indicates their support for their children and their children's education. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly: Marian Kyle, Tim Summers, Ilona Jackson, Barb Girouard, Carol Harris, Trish Haryett, Joan Weitzel, Debbie Henwood, Shelly Novlesky, Kathy Colliou, Cheryl Pronovost, Catherine Yamada, Mark Nickel, Helga Medford, and Wayne Jackson. Give them a warm welcome, please.

Thank you very much.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a very active worker in the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. We are joined today by Guy Ouellette, who is the president of the Liberal association there and who is currently organizing a very actively contested nomination, which will be very lively, and will present to us an excellent candidate at the end of the day. We would ask Mr. Ouellette to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly one of our caucus support staff. She organizes our petitions. She gets calls from all over Alberta and e-mails all of us, and will e-mail anyone else that would like. Her name is Joan Swain. Her e-mail address is jswain@assembly.ab.ca, and she welcomes all of you. She'll help you organize your petitions as well. So please stand, Joan, and receive our welcome.

THE SPEAKER: Well, I think that now everyone in the galleries has been introduced save one person, and that's a former member of this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Peter Sekulic.

head: Oral Question Period

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, the choice is very clear. On the one

hand, you have the people of Alberta and the Official Opposition, and on the other side you have the Premier and his government, who are fronting for the special interests pushing for his whole privatization scheme. The Premier promised in his 90-day plan to fix public health care. That was over 1,614 days ago. Albertans trusted this Premier to do that. Today he has given up. He has bowed to the special interests, and he's betrayed the trust of Albertans by bringing in private hospitals legislation. A broken promise to fix public health care, a massive spin campaign, stonewalling Albertans with his secret private hospitals agenda and focus groups: Albertans just don't trust this Premier anymore. Why doesn't this Premier just level with Albertans and admit that this bill is a Trojan horse, that his real agenda – his real agenda – is to allow private hospitals right across Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there is no Trojan horse other than the one the Liberals tried to bring into the television room today.

Mr. Speaker, when the leader of the Liberal opposition alluded to the opposition Liberals and the Friends of Medicare and CUPE, she forgot the NDs. The NDs have been very aggressive in this too. I mean, let's be fair.

2:10

Quite simply, the message contained in the bill is quite clear. The legislation confirms Alberta's commitment to publicly funded health care and to the principles of the Canada Health Act. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is opposed to that, stand up and say so now so that all Albertans will know where she stands. It will ban private hospitals. If the leader of the Liberal opposition is opposed to that, stand up and say so now. Say so now. Queue-jumping will be illegal. If the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition is opposed to that, stand up and say so now.

To answer the question, this has absolutely nothing to do with special interest groups, and I don't know what she's talking about. Mr. Speaker, this hon. member has alluded to special interest groups, oh, four or five or six times in this Legislative Assembly. She has never stood up to say who these special interest groups are. She has never stood up to say who they might be connected with, what their professions might be, in what discipline of our health service they might be operating. She makes these very vague generalizations relative to special interest groups. She does not have the courage to stand up and say who they are. Perhaps if she won't in the Legislature, maybe she'll go outside and name them.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'm going to call on the Leader of the Official Opposition to continue . . .

[Disturbance in the gallery]

THE SERGEANT AT ARMS: Order. Order. Order in the gallery. You're not part of the proceedings. Order in the gallery. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members. Hon. members, this is a parliament, and the people who have arrived here have been elected in the province of Alberta. I have no difficulty whatsoever in reading from the book again, but I'm just going to give one precis: decorum is important. There are basic rules about questions, and there are basic rules about answers. We started this first question at 8 minutes after 2. That's nearly six minutes. That's way too long. Succinct questions, succinct answers, and decorum is all important. All important.

Private Health Services (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is this Premier saying that 5,000 citizens from Grande Prairie, 5,200 citizens from Red Deer, and over 10,000 other Albertans who have signed petitions are guilty of malicious misinformation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, if they have been reading the information that has been sent out by the Liberals, they have indeed been reading malicious misinformation, because what they have been saying simply is not true.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is in the bill. The truth is in the bill. We will be sending that bill out on Monday to every household in the province. We will be sending this bill out to every household in the province.

I know that that doesn't sit well with the leader of the Liberal opposition. She doesn't believe in bills that purport to become the law of this province, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, she was saying on a radio program today: it's hard for an average citizen to read legislation. In other words, what she is saying to Albertans is: you're not smart enough, Albertans, to read legislation. That's what this hon. member is saying, and that's what she thinks of Albertans.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will this Premier explain why he is putting the well-being of special interests ahead of the well-being of the people of this province?

MR. KLEIN: Again, Mr. Speaker, that is not the case, but I would ask this hon. member to do the honourable thing and stand up and cite all of these special interest groups, to whom they are connected, what their particular interest is. If she won't do it in this House, maybe she will do the honourable thing and do it outside the House so that these special interest groups, whomever they might be, can learn for themselves who they might be.

MRS. MacBETH: First the truth squads, next a bombardment of Albertans' homes with a blitzkrieg of this Premier's propaganda and spin to promote his Trojan horse private hospitals bill, yet the Premier will not show Albertans the research that his whole spin campaign is based upon. Why doesn't the Premier admit that the real plan to bring in private hospitals is in these blanked-out pages?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I remember very well when the leader of the Liberal opposition was a member of Executive Council. During her tenure as minister of education and as minister of health I'm sure that she introduced a number of bills. Now she calls legislation propaganda. What was it when she was on Executive Council? We didn't call her legislation propaganda. Even the ND opposition at that time didn't call a bill of the House propaganda. They had the decency of understanding what a bill is.

A bill is absolutely paramount. It is the instrument for reasoned debate in this Legislative Assembly, and it is the instrument that purports to become law. That is not propaganda. What is propaganda is the kinds of ads that the Liberals have been running, the orchestrated campaign to gain signatures on a petition based on malicious misinformation. That's what propaganda is all about.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are seeing through this Premier.

Is the reason the Premier won't show Albertans their own documents because the focus groups told him that Albertans don't want his private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, Bill 11 is the document of Albertans. This is the document that will go to all households in this province. This bill is the culmination of one of the most intensive public consultation processes ever undertaken by this government. This is the culmination of the involvement of Albertans: those in favour, those opposed, and those who simply want more information.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, if they weren't in trouble, they wouldn't need their propaganda campaign.

Is the reason the Premier won't show Albertans their own document because it tests the language and the spin that are most effective in fooling Albertans about private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, obviously the leader of the Liberal opposition, in her endeavour to out-stunt the stunt people even in Hollywood, has not taken time to read the bill. She has not taken time, obviously, to read the bill, because the bill quite clearly states that it will ban private hospitals. What could be clearer than that?

2:20

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this bill isn't worth the paper it was printed on. In fact, the best thing Albertans can do with it is to throw it in their recycle bin and have the propaganda package along with it and ship it off to the Premier's special waste treatment plant in Swan Hills. That is how toxic this plan is for public health care. This is the mechanism to set up American styled health care in this province. The bill says that insured hospital services can only be provided in "a public hospital" or in "an approved surgical facility." Will the Premier admit that "approved surgical facility" is the new code word for private hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Two points, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the Liberal opposition should know what a surgical facility is all about. I mean, there were 37 of them operating under her watch and approved by the minister of that particular time.

Mr. Speaker, the other point: when I was in this Legislature as minister of the environment and this hon. member was minister of health, she had nothing but praise for the special waste treatment plant at Swan Hills.

MRS. MacBETH: Approved surgical facility: is that the language that his focus groups told him were the most acceptable in selling private hospitals in his spin campaign?

MR. KLEIN: No spin campaign here, Mr. Speaker. The only spin doctors sitting in this Legislative Assembly are right there in the Liberal caucus and to some degree in the ND caucus. Well, what's left of it.

Mr. Speaker, this is a bill. This is a very important document. This is the most important document that this Legislative Assembly can receive and consider, and to refer to this as propaganda is absolutely shameful. I point out again that this is the result of one of the most intensive public consultation exercises in the history of this province and certainly of this Legislative Assembly.

We're now waiting to hear even further from Albertans as to what they think about this legislation. Mr. Speaker, what 3 million Albertans think about this legislation is far more important to me than the biased, emotional, untruthful kind of rhetoric that is coming out of the mouths of the Liberal Party.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, will the Premier get out from under the dome? Will he quit hiding behind his propaganda machine? Will he meet me face to face in front of Albertans to discuss health

care in this province? Why would he want to run away from that opportunity? I'll answer Albertans' questions. Will he?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I hate to say it, but the last time I met the leader of the Liberal opposition face to face, she didn't like the outcome at all.

I have given an undertaking to debate the bill in front of live television in this Legislative Assembly when it reaches second reading stage. There is no better place, Mr. Speaker, with you, sir, as the referee to debate a bill. That's where a bill should be debated, not in Liberal orchestrated or ND orchestrated town hall meetings but in the Legislature.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After being subjected for months and months to tax-paid propaganda by this government, Albertans have learned today to their horror that Bill 11 is nothing but enabling legislation that will throw the door wide open to private, for-profit hospitals. The real agenda behind Bill 11 has not changed since this Premier took office. The agenda is to privatize our much-loved public health care system. This is the clear conclusion of the latest study on this issue released today by Dr. Richard Plain, a well-respected health care economist from the University of Alberta. My questions are to the Premier. Why is the government relying on a slick public relations campaign to sell the bill when in fact it should be heeding and respecting solid evidence which clearly shows that 37 hospital corporations like HRG will deliver surgical services at a much higher cost than large public hospitals such as the Foothills or the Rockyview?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, do I take it from that that this hon. member is also questioning the ability of Albertans to read a bill and understand a bill?

There are a multitude of reports on this particular issue. We have read those reports. We have received those reports. We have heard all sides of this issue. On the basis of what we've heard – and it's in a document, Mr. Speaker. Everyone has the document. On the basis of what we have heard, this bill was prepared, sir.

Albertans once again will have another opportunity to examine the bill. There is no rhetoric in this bill. There is no emotion in this bill. This bill is fact. This bill is an intention of what this government proposes to do in terms of enacting law. That is not public relations, Mr. Speaker. That is parliamentary procedure. That's all it is.

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, there's certainly no emotion worth respecting in this bill. You're right.

How does the Premier expect Albertans to believe that Bill 11 won't allow queue-jumping when such queue-jumping is taking place as I speak at private MRI clinics in Edmonton and Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, the bill is here for the consideration of this Legislature because we want it to become law. Quite clearly in the bill it says that there will be no queue-jumping. Now, if the hon. member is opposed to the bill, then I would take it that he's in favour of queue-jumping, because the bill, once it becomes law, says that there will be no queue-jumping. We expect people in this province to obey the law.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Isn't Bill 11 just a blank cheque designed to bail out private business interests like those at HRG who aren't able to make a profit without dipping into the taxpayer's pocket?

MR. KLEIN: No, it's not a blank cheque, Mr. Speaker. There are all kinds of rules and regulations associated with this bill relative to the ability of regional health authorities to contract out. If the hon. member wants a little bit of a clinic on the bill, I'm sure the hon. minister will be glad to give him one.

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

2:30

Federal Support for Agriculture

MR. JACQUES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Outrage is a mild word to describe the reaction of the farmers in my constituency and indeed throughout Alberta with regard to the financial penalty that the Liberal federal government is imposing on Alberta grain producers by unilaterally excluding Alberta farmers from the assistance program announced a week ago today. This Liberal decision is at its best the height of ignorance and at its worst an obscene form of political penalty. All of my questions are to the minister responsible for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given your meeting yesterday with the federal Liberal minister of agriculture, would you please advise Alberta farmers of the rationale put forward by the Liberal government to exclude Alberta farmers from this program?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that there was ever any rational thinking that went into this decision I think would be a real stretch. Quite frankly, it looks to me like the whole thing was cooked up between the Prime Minister and one minister, Mr. Goodale. I believe that Mr. Goodale is trying to shovel some money into some farmer's pockets because his empire is crumbling, that empire being the Canadian Wheat Board. I believe he's very, very anxious to try to get some money into their pockets so that they will support the Wheat Board.

I mean, the Wheat Board is out there telling farmers now that the price of grain is going to go up. Well, they're the only people doing any analysis in the world that are suggesting that grain prices are going to go up much in the foreseeable future. The surpluses that are out there are high enough that you'd have to see a major catastrophe in one of the countries that produces grain in order for that to happen.

It's a very difficult one to figure out, and while we had reasonable meetings yesterday, I don't see any rationale behind it.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Minister, how did the facts that are faced today by Alberta farmers compare with the so-called lack of rationale or reasons put forward by the government yesterday in your meeting?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, there were two ways they were trying to rationalize this thing. Quite frankly, I believe what's happened is that the sums of money arrived, they were dispersed, and now the minister of agriculture is left with a number of people with computers and calculators trying to figure out how can they rationalize that it goes to two provinces and not to a province like Alberta.

So they use things like the fact that the areas that were flooded last year weren't covered under the emergency disaster services because they were insured losses. They use rationale that the freight rates have gone up more in Saskatchewan and Manitoba since the buyout of the western grain transportation, and they're using a figure of \$18.

When you look at the facts, the fact is that we had as many acres that did not produce last year in Alberta as in Saskatchewan, and the farmers in our province that didn't get a crop had input costs. Many of those farmers in Manitoba did not have. The issue of the \$18:

well, the fact is that the average increase in Alberta since the buyout of the Crow is \$17.10. Through using their calculations, they tell me that only 4 percent of ours have gone up that much. How could it possibly be that only 4 percent are above \$18 when in fact the average is \$17.10? So the rationale just doesn't work.

MR. JACQUES: Mr. Minister, are you prepared to give serious consideration to an Alberta go-it-alone program which would represent the approximate 60 million to 70 million dollar cost to Alberta that we would otherwise have paid out had the federal program been applied to Alberta?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, back in October, before we announced the changes to the farm income disaster program and the disaster loan program, we praised the federal government on the fact that we were going to make these changes, and we expected that we would get our 60 percent in that program. We haven't got anything to this point. We're still working on it. We intend to keep on. Believe me, we will and we are looking at the disaster situations in this province, and we will be addressing those.

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

Private Health Services

(continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've had a chance to read the bill, and quite frankly what I have to say to the Premier is: three strikes and you're out. The reality is that this Premier is playing Russian roulette with our public health care system by having the College of Physicians and Surgeons, whose role is to approve clinical standards, now through bylaw approve commercial enterprises, those approved surgical facilities that are really code for mini private, for-profit hospitals. My questions are to the Premier. When the Premier's bill talks about insured services and "enhanced medical goods or services," isn't he really talking about establishing a list of core services, minimum standards that will push Albertans to the private sector?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite the opposite. Quite the opposite. The bill quite specifically alludes to very stringent rules and regulations under which private surgical clinics must operate.

Relative to the involvement of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, this is absolutely necessary, and I will have the hon. minister explain why.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the hon. member does not see the College of Physicians and Surgeons in terms of its true importance in assessing the quality of services, the capability, for instance, of surgical services and authorizing, accrediting those parts of the health care system. I think they are by far the most expert and most credible group in the province to deal with that part of the approval of hospitals or surgical facilities in terms of standards and safety and the betterment of patient treatment. That I think is a very important part of the legislation. It is in there very clearly.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would invite the hon. member to read the rest of the bill. There are other provisions there with respect to a process, the criteria involved, and the ultimate approval by the minister of the particular facility contract. So there are many protections in this piece of legislation.

MS LEIBOVICI: Asking the college to do your dirty work.

As the Premier has indicated a commitment to the Canada Health Act, can the Premier tell us today: if there's a conflict between this legislation, your Bill 11, and the Canada Health Act, which act prevails? Where is that clause in the act?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, quite simply the Canada Health Act prevails, and that's why, sir, we have taken the unprecedented move of sending this bill to the federal Minister of Health for his comments. If the Liberals have any influence whatsoever in Ottawa, I would urge them to ask Mr. Rock to get us his response as quickly as possible. We've kept the federal government involved in this process every step of the way.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the Premier has nothing to hide from either the federal Minister of Health or the Members of this Legislative Assembly or the members of the public, where are the regulations that you have promised us for the last few weeks?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as many of the regulations as possible are contained in this bill. [interjections] If they don't want to hear the answer, I'll sit down. Okay? [interjections] Well, they don't want to hear the answer.

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

Gasoline Prices

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Representing Calgary-Fort constituents, I would like to bring forth their real daily concern. I believe this is also a concern across Alberta. It is the gasoline price. Many hardworking Albertans such as factory workers, office workers, farmers, taxicab drivers, truck drivers, and many Alberta companies depend on transportation to make their living. The rising cost of gasoline is getting to an intolerable level. My question is to the Minister of Resource Development. Could the minister explain why gasoline prices are so high?

2:40

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, this is probably one of the biggest questions I am asked right now. Every time a commodity price moves at the speed this one has in the last year, one that is used by so many people in their daily lives, it is shocking. Now, what happened was that a year ago in January the average price of oil was \$12 a barrel in the province of Alberta, about \$12.21. It fluctuated in and around the \$12 mark. Today it's \$30 and pushing \$31. Well, what happens is that the price does track the price of a barrel of oil, about a 1 cent per dollar rise.

If you looked at the price of gasoline a year ago – and our memories are very short – you would have seen in January '99 that Edmonton was at 42.9, Calgary was at 46.9, and the average for the province was 44.9 or 45 cents. Today we are looking at roughly 62.9 or 63 cents in the province of Alberta. The price of oil has gone up \$18 a barrel, from that \$12 to the \$30. It tracks 1 cent per dollar for a barrel of oil, which would be 18 cents, which added to 45 would make it 63 cents.

That doesn't help the people that have to pay this, and we would hope that as OPEC looks at world supply – and they've recently made a decision to increase production – they would produce another 2 million barrels a day. They have said that they're going to look at this. This will then put a downward pressure on the price per barrel of oil.

So, yes, the margins haven't changed a lot for the retailer. The

markups haven't changed, as the bureau just did an investigation, but the price of a barrel of oil has gone up. Remember that \$30 a barrel American is \$45 a barrel Canadian.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the Minister of Resource Development. What role does government play in gasoline pricing?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, that is the other question that should be answered to the people of Alberta. Tax is 40 to 45 percent of a litre of gasoline. We have a fixed one, 9 cents a litre. It didn't move at all when the price of gas went up to 62 cents from 44 cents a year ago. It stays at 9 cents a litre. Now, the federal government, too, has a tax, that is 10 cents a litre, but they also have the GST. The GST on that gallon of gas at 45 cents a year ago was 2 and a half cents. Today, at 63 cents, 7 percent is put on the 63 cents, which brings the federal tax another nearly 4 and a half cents higher. So today the federal government is taking close to 14-plus cents a litre and gets an advantage as the price of gasoline goes up.

MR. CAO: My second supplementary question is also to the same minister. The provincial and the federal taxes make up a big chunk of the gasoline price, so do these added costs translate into any benefit to Alberta?

DR. WEST: The tragedy of the whole gasoline story is that we take the taxes from this litre of fuel to put into roads in the province of Alberta. We take the licence plates and we take this 9 cents a litre and we put it into the roads. It only covers about half of what we're spending on roads today. The federal government takes it, about \$5 billion – and it's mounting now. If you take the GST on gasoline plus their tax, they take over \$5 billion today, and last year, until this recent budget, they've only put about \$200 million back into roads.

When the truckers and the people of Canada say, "Why are we paying so much on this gasoline?" they should ask the federal government if they would move some of that money back into infrastructure in the province or, if they're not going to, to make a consideration to lower their tax or freeze the GST on a litre of fuel.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, followed by the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Private Health Services

(continued)

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, this Premier calling private hospitals approved surgical facilities in this bill is just like the American military calling dead civilians collateral damage.

MR. HAVELOCK: Point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Given that this Premier has said that it's all in the bill, when I look at the bill, I see that it says that the services that will be provided at these so-called approved surgical facilities depends on bylaws made under the Medical Profession Act. Well, isn't it true, Mr. Premier, that in fact today there are no bylaws that define major surgical services, so this bill is really nothing more than an illusion of protection?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't think he has read the bill. Really I don't think he has, because it says, "No person shall operate a private hospital in Alberta." That is clear. Even this member can understand that. He should be able to.

Secondly, it says, "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta," whether it's a therapeutic abortion, a cataract surgery,

whatever. I'm reading from the bill, Mr. Speaker: "No person shall provide a surgical service in Alberta except in . . . a public hospital." If he wants to know what a public hospital looks like, I would suggest that he could be excused right now and go down and have a look at the Royal Alex or the University hospital, to go over to Grey Nuns or over to Misericordia. If he doesn't know what a hospital looks like, maybe he'll take the time now and go and see what one looks like. Or in "an approved surgical facility." It says – and here is the answer to the question – "No person shall provide a major surgical service, as described in the by-laws under the Medical Profession Act, in Alberta except in a public hospital."

If he needs further explanation I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I think the House should be reminded, particularly the Liberal opposition, that some months ago when this issue was before the Assembly for discussion in question period, it was well noted at that time that there was a legislative gap or a weakness in the system in terms of our ability to regulate these surgical clinics.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons had done work. It had considerable discussion on the development of the bylaws that would govern the quality and standards and accreditation of surgical clinics. However, some members of the House may recall that the college was reluctant to move forward with that without there being the proper legislative framework in legislation on the other side, in terms of the government's responsibility. So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very much on record that the college is interested in this area. They are concerned about making sure that there are the standards, that there is the quality. They certainly are aware of the issue and have done some work on it.

MR. SAPERS: So the truth is that there are no bylaws. You know, Mr. Speaker, they say that we should read the bill. Maybe the Premier should read his own legislation.

Now, given that the Premier has said in this Chamber and elsewhere that this is just an experiment and that if it fails, somehow we can go back, if that's true, Mr. Premier, where in this bill is the mechanism to go back? Where's the sunset clause? Where's the ability to go back?

MR. KLEIN: Will the hon. member quote the *Hansard* where purportedly I made those comments? I did not make those comments. I would ask the hon. member because he used a quote. He said that I made those statements in this House, the statement that this is an experiment. Will he cite the authority? Will he cite the *Hansard* in which I said that, Mr. Speaker, or withdraw it?

2:50

MR. SAPERS: I'll find it, and I'll be happy to cite it, Mr. Speaker. I'll get it to you. Why don't you answer the question? Why don't you answer the question? Why don't you answer the question?

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Rules

THE SPEAKER: Whoa. Sit down, please. Whoa. Thursday afternoon.

Well, we had a debate going on again, and we have certain rules about debating in the question period. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, you asked three times why he didn't answer the question. I presume that was the question? Well, then it was a preamble, which is outlawed.

MR. SAPERS: I withdraw the preamble.

THE SPEAKER: So we can move on now?

MR. SAPERS: To my next question.

THE SPEAKER: Well, what was all that filler in there, all of which violated every rule?

Please proceed with your third question, with no preamble, to the point.

Private Health Services (continued)

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has said that he'll be open and transparent and given that the legislation is supposed to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth, perhaps the Premier will explain why there are 20 different elements in this bill that will require secret, behind-closed-door lawmaking. Why is it that so many elements of this bill require regulations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there are several regulations that provide for the protection of the public health system as we know it today.

Relative to the specifics of the bill, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this very important bill has actually in overall terms very few regulatory sections. The very important parts of the bill are there in the text. I'm sure the opposition is somewhat concerned about that because it's not to their advantage, but it is certainly to the advantage of Albertans. You have it very clearly stated: there shall be no private hospitals. I could go through the rest of the text of the legislation pointing out where we have addressed the major issues in this whole area. I would invite them to continue to read the bill and understand it before they make judgments on how many regulations will be required.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Registry Fees

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the hon. Minister of Government Services. We've all heard that the fees that Alberta registries charge for certain services have been greatly reduced, by some \$55 million. These fees fall under land titles, personal property and corporate registries. Motor vehicle registry fees make up the lion's share of these fees that Alberta registries collect, yet none of the fees are being reduced. Can the minister explain why it is that motor vehicle registry fees are not included among the fee reductions?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond to this as this was an item that was in the budget that our Treasurer brought down just a few days ago.

I want to say at the beginning that based on the Ontario case where the court ordered the Ontario government to review its fees and charges, Alberta was the only province that proceeded voluntarily to go through an extensive review of its fees and charges. In the case of Government Services, we have put in the budget a reduction of 94 various fees and charges that are under our responsibility. The Department of Justice also had some fee reductions in that budget document. This came about as a complete review and cost analysis of every fee that was charged through this department, and that was headed up by the Member for St. Albert. She was in charge of the fees review committee.

In regard to the particular fee structure for motor vehicles, it was determined through this review process that those fees were appropriate. It's recognized that those fees benefit the people who are on the highways because those fees are dedicated to enforcement and to improvement of the provincial roads. So the fees were appropriate as they were being charged, and that is why there is not a reduction on those particular fees, albeit other fees in fact were reduced.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My supplemental to the same minister. I understand that private registry agents are responsible for delivering personal property and corporate registry services and are allowed to charge service fees over and above that fee set by government. What assurances do Albertans have that the reductions that have been announced will be passed on to them?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, when the province made the decision, led by our government, to make a change in how we deliver services insofar as registries and motor vehicle licensing, et cetera, and all those functions that were attached to the motor vehicle branches a number of years ago, we entered into a partnership arrangement to have that frontline delivery contracted out. Quite frankly, it's been extremely successful. People can now go in and get a driver's licence or a car licence plate without having to take a day off work and are treated very well in the registries.

We are under a partnership contract with the registry agents, and when we make a decision to reduce the government side of the fee structure, then we send an instruction out to the registry agents and instruct them to reduce that fee to Albertans. I'm able to report that in the first review we did immediately after the budget was filed, most of our registry agents had already put the reduced fees in place.

We did make the commitment that we would be monitoring our registry agents, some 228 in the province of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that they continue to pass on the savings of the almost 94 fee structures to Albertans so that they benefit from the \$54 million that was coming out of the revenue base for the Department of Government Services. This benefit is moving forward. We monitor these fees on a continual basis, and we will continue to do so.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That begs another question. Since we've heard about the total amount, about \$55 million, and even about how much these fees were reduced, my question is: how was each figure arrived at?

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, we have gone through extensive analysis of the fees that were in place to determine what costs were appropriate. We have a cost recovery mechanism on the delivery of these services through Government Services. Each fee was looked at as to what the cost of the program was. We took all of our costs and factored them in, and that was the fee that was charged. A number of those fees, I can say, have been eliminated entirely, and for some of them, people can access information with no charge whatsoever.

head: Members' Statements

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'm going to call on the first of three hon. members to participate in Members' Statements today, but before we do that, please join me in congratulating the hon. Member for Little Bow on an election anniversary in the next day or two.

The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

3:00

Medicine Hat Hospital MRI Unit

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to draw to your attention and to the attention of all members, in particular the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, an important decision that was recently announced by the Palliser regional health authority. That decision was to proceed with planning and preparation for the acquisition and operation of an MRI unit in the Medicine Hat regional hospital. The board has authorized local foundations within the Palliser health region to begin fund-raising. There will also be a subsequent request for appropriate capital funding from Alberta Health and Wellness. At the same time the board indicated that it will be in a position to incorporate annual operating costs into its budget in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, the medical staff within the region have been calling for an MRI for a number of years, and the general public in south-eastern Alberta have seen MRIs funded for Lethbridge, Red Deer, and Grande Prairie. The reasons stated by the minister that Medicine Hat was not included in last year's announcements was that the PRHA had not identified it as a priority. Over time the number of MRI scans required has increased, and the RHA budget has grown. The board has been monitoring the situation and has determined that circumstances are now such that they can give MRI acquisition the priority designation it requires.

MRI acquisition is not something that can be taken lightly. The board is to be commended for waiting until both demand and financial viability were reached before proceeding with plans to acquire an MRI.

Today I am pleased to rise in my place and indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, that this project has my full support. I want to assure the people of southeastern Alberta that I am committed to work with the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Minister of Infrastructure to ensure that MRI funding is provided to Medicine Hat in a timely and equitable manner. The people of Medicine Hat and southeastern Alberta deserve no less.

Thank you.

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

Defenders of Health Care System

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak about those Albertans that are attempting to preserve a high-quality, public health care system, the hundreds, the thousands. First, the unsung heroes. The unsung heroes are those who organize forums, those who organize petitions, those who go door to door, those who sign the petitions; in other words, the grass roots of Alberta, that are spread throughout the province.

Then of course there are those that felt the brunt of the health care cuts and the restructuring: the health caregivers, the overworked nurses, the overworked doctors, the other medical staff in the medical facilities, and of course paramedic drivers, who sometimes drive around with a patient in the back with no emergency room to take them to.

Then there are those high-profile individuals who tend to speak out more; Kevin Taft, for example. His recent book, *Clear Answers*, highly recommended reading, was co-written by another Albertan, Gillian Steward from Calgary, who has fought to preserve the health care system for years. We have Donna Wilson from the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Alberta. We have Wendy Armstrong from the Alberta chapter of the Consumers' Association. We have Christine Burdette, who gives of herself steadily, representing the Friends of Medicare; all those others associated with the Friends of Medicare; and Dr. Richard Plain, who presented another one of his

studies. These are the Albertans that are fighting to preserve a high-quality public health care system.

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

Public/Private Sector Health Partnerships

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to talk about the significance of health care partnerships and innovative approaches and the bottom-line benefit to receivers of service, to Albertans, for whom the partnerships were created in the first place. It seems to me that in recent weeks during the political debate around legislation to further improve delivery of our health care system, many have chosen to ignore why changes are even being considered. Recent media coverage has focused on the negative speculation loudly voiced by opposition colleagues rather than on covering wonderful new initiatives in the health system, which are only possible because of partnerships and which are designed to better serve the needs of citizens of the community.

Last Friday I attended the grand opening of the innovative Carewest Signal Pointe Alzheimer's centre in my constituency of Calgary-West. The pride of over 200 people was evident as our Health and Wellness minister congratulated Carewest on the unique centre, designed to better serve the needs of 48 full-time residents from the Calgary community who have moderate to severe Alzheimer's. Also, community support services include six respite care beds, a day program for dementia people living at home, and a resource centre for home caregivers as 60 percent of people with dementia are cared for at home. This wonderful centre, including equipment and furnishings, has been funded through a partnership between Carewest, the provincial government, and the private sector.

Monday I attended the opening of the Family Caregiver Centre in Calgary, which is a true partnership between Scotiabank and the Calgary Health Trust. Caregiving is gaining increasing recognition as one desirable way for society to cope with the impact of our aging population. I agreed to be honorary chair as I totally support living at one's home as long as possible with the help of necessary supports.

We are talking about the future, Mr. Speaker, our future, and the fact that Alberta's senior population of 300,000 will double to 600,000 by 2016. I'm very proud to say that innovative partnerships in health care are providing very positive encouragement to the challenges we face in the future.

head: Projected Government Business

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's that wonderful time of the week when I'm entitled to ask the Government House Leader if he would preview the legislation and activity we might contemplate for next week.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, March 6, under Government Bills and Orders for second reading, if not already dealt with: Bill 1, Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research Act; Bill 2, First Nations Sacred Ceremonial Objects Repatriation Act; Bill 3, Statute Revision Act; Bill 4, Surveys Amendment Act; Bill 5, Land Titles Amendment Act; if there's time, government motions 5, 6, and 7, being the spring, Easter, and sessional adjournment motions; and as per the Order Paper.

Monday at 8 p.m. of course under Government Bills and Orders we will be convening in Committee of Supply to deal with the main

estimates of the Provincial Treasurer in subcommittee A and Justice and Attorney General in subcommittee B. Providing there's time, we will deal with the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, Bill 12, and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 7, at 4:30 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders, government motions 5, 6, and 7, the spring, Easter, and sessional adjournment motions, if they haven't been previously disposed of; and as per the Order Paper. On Tuesday at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders in Committee of Supply: in the Assembly, subcommittee C, Agriculture, Food and Rural Development main estimates; in room 512, subcommittee D, Innovation and Science main estimates. Thereafter, Committee of the Whole, Bill 12, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000; and as per the Order Paper.

On Wednesday, March 8, at 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders: in the Assembly, committee A, Executive Council main estimates; in room 512, committee B, Infrastructure main estimates. Thereafter third reading of Bill 12, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2000, and as per the Order Paper.

On Thursday, March 9, under Government Bills and Orders, such estimates as may be designated by the Official Opposition on Monday; and as per the Order Paper based on progress Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I have notice that today there will be an hon. member rising on a notice of contempt, which will require some explanation, and four notices of points of order, which we will now deal with.

Before we begin, I would just like to quote one line from *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, the sixth edition. The authors, Fraser, Dawson and Holtby, say: "Television has made a marked impact on Parliament and public perception thereof." How different it is at 10 minutes after 3 than it was a few minutes before. Amazing. It's too bad that 3 million citizens can't see the way we really do most of our work.

3:10

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a major point. Hon. member, before you begin, I'm not sure what a point of contempt is, so please quote from the Standing Orders, and if you're dealing with a point of privilege, it's Standing Order 15. This chairman would view contempt in the same regards as privilege, not a lightly taken matter.

Privilege

Contempt of the Assembly

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, let me say first that the last time I remember this Assembly dealing with a question of contempt was when I raised it – I think it was a year ago – in connection with the health summit, and there was some considerable discussion then in terms of process. I wanted to give the earliest possible notice, so that's why there's been no written notice to you.

The concern is this. The authority I'm relying on is principally *Erskine May*, page 108. I'd just cite the general authority.

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

The basis of the claim is this, Mr. Speaker. These are the facts as I understand them. This afternoon at 12:15 the Premier's office and the Minister of Health and Wellness arranged for a preview of Bill 11 in the media room downstairs in this building, and at 1 o'clock

the Premier was to join that group and preview and answer questions with respect to Bill 11. Now, those people entitled to attend or invited to attend were apparently members of the media gallery here in the Assembly. This happened after the bill had been put on notice and appeared on the Order Paper and we'd received confirmation of notice and before the bill had received first reading.

The Leader of the Official Opposition attended at the media room with this member. When she entered the doors of the media room, a young woman, an employee of the government – and I think it serves little purpose to embarrass the individual woman. I take it she was acting on instructions of the Premier, the Minister of Health and Wellness, or the chair of this meeting, the Member for Calgary-Glenmore. This young woman came up, told Mrs. MacBeth that she could not enter the room. Physically, in terms of the Criminal Code, in my view, it would be an assault, because without the consent of Mrs. MacBeth she applied – it was a physical application of force. I witnessed it. Mrs. MacBeth was told to leave. The Member for Calgary-Glenmore, who was chairing the meeting, advised Mrs. MacBeth that she had to leave.

My concern is this, Mr. Speaker. We have seen with budgets that there are lockups where a member of the opposition or a researcher is entitled to go into the lockup to preview a budget before it's been entered. I am not aware, at least in my time in the Assembly, that a public bill ever has been exposed to a private group for review before the bill comes into this Assembly and is given first reading.

The thrust of my argument is that what you have is an affront to every single member in this Assembly. We are the only people who represent the 3 million people in this province. It is our job. It's not some selected group of reporters or media people. There clearly have been multiple briefings, technical briefings after a bill has been given first reading and MLAs have been exposed to it and had a chance to see it.

In terms of the remedy I'm looking for, the proposition is this. It is not to have my friend for Calgary-Glenmore or the Minister of Health and Wellness or the Premier carted off in handcuffs. What I want to resolve is whether it is permissible for a public bill to be shared with a select group of Albertans privately invited in designate by a member of Executive Council. That the Leader of the Opposition would be denied access to that briefing, that this member would be denied access to that briefing clearly, in my respectful view, obstructs and impedes us in doing our job.

More importantly, it draws enormous disrespect to the role that each of us plays. What's the point in attaching any significance to first reading of any public bill if the government has gone and previewed the darn thing and shared it with groups of Albertans beforehand? We then become nothing more than a rubber-stamping facility of minor importance. So much for all of the tradition and history of the British parliamentary system.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the facts, as I understand them. As I say, I have the name of the woman that pushed the Leader of the Opposition, but as I say, the principal concern is that you had at least two elected members in this province denied access not to a private office but to a media room, that customarily all MLAs have access to and utilize on a regular basis.

I know of no precedent for this, Mr. Speaker. You've been here a lot longer than I have, and you may have seen this practice happen before. I've always been advised, as long as I've been here, that first reading of a bill is a very special occasion. I've had ministers of the Crown tell me multiple times that they could not share with me the text of the bill. They could tell me a little bit about what was in it, but they couldn't share the text because that had to wait for first reading of the bill. Now, if the rules have changed and all that tradition has gone out the window, Mr. Speaker, would you, please,

tell us that? I'd like to have that instruction and information.

You might also look at *Erskine May*, pages 108 and 117. I'm not going to take your time to cite that. There is some interesting reference that's somewhat collateral, but I found in *Beauchesne*, debates October 30, 1969, in the House of Commons, pages 269 and 270 – and it's been clear, Mr. Speaker, that for a minister to make a ministerial statement outside the House would not offend the practices of the House in making announcements, ministerial statements, communications to the public. That's perfectly in order. But this is something very special, very different. It's clearly different qualitatively than a Budget Address and details of the budget. We're talking about a bill.

I'd just conclude, Mr. Speaker, with this observation. I put forward this proposition, that once a bill is put on notice on the Order Paper, as this one was, in effect all of this Legislative Assembly has a proprietary interest in that bill, and it's no longer the playing of a particular bill sponsor. If it's going to be shared and there are going to be technical briefings, let them happen after it's been introduced in this Assembly and every single member has had a chance to see it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There seem to be two issues that have been raised by the hon. Opposition House Leader, and I think the two are essentially the same.

The first, relative to access by the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition House Leader to a meeting which was being held with respect to a technical briefing relating to the bill. In particular, there was an allegation of an assault. My understanding of the situation, although I admit I was not there, is somewhat different than was reported. In fact, my understanding is that there was a door closed by one of the parties in question, and perhaps the assault could have gone the other way. However, that's extraneous.

What's important today is the question of whether or not the privileges of the members were breached. I would note – and I'll file with the House copies of letters, one addressed to Nancy MacBeth, Leader of the Official Opposition.

3:20

AN HON. MEMBER: It's already been tabled.

MR. HANCOCK: Has it been tabled this afternoon? Okay. I understand it was tabled.

There was a similar letter to the interim leader of the third party inviting them to an opportunity for a technical briefing on the details of the bill. It said:

Please contact my office if you or other members of your Caucus would be interested in such a briefing and we can arrange a mutually convenient time.

It's my understanding that they did not avail themselves of the opportunity for that briefing. They didn't call and ask for that briefing, instead showed up at a different meeting to which other people had been invited for a technical briefing on the details of the bill.

So I think it's quite inappropriate for them to raise the question on the basis of being denied the opportunity for a technical briefing on the bill. In fact they were invited to a briefing. They were not invited to the one they chose to attend. I understand that it was not the member in charge of that meeting who decided that in fact the two members in question could not attend that meeting but the media representatives that were there. The media representatives that were there were asked if they wanted those members to be allowed to sit

in the meeting. It was their meeting, and they indicated that they did not. So that was communicated to them.

Members of the opposition were not denied the opportunity to have the same technical briefing as the media in this particular situation.

Now, the second portion of that, the question of the preview of a bill. This government is renowned for its consultation with Albertans. It's renowned for asking Albertans. In fact, the content of this bill is no secret. The surgical services policy was put out in November. It was published. There was a television address. There's been continuous discussion about the policy, as there should be. Since that time the content has been discussed in this House since we opened the House. The Premier has answered questions on almost a daily basis, has indicated to the House that the bill would ban private hospitals, that the bill would ban queue-jumping, went through a litany of what was going to be in the bill. So there was no secret in the bill.

I can assure the House that no media was given a copy of the bill that was presented in this House. They may have had access to the content of that bill, but they were not provided a copy of Bill 11 in its published form. The interests of the House have been preserved; the interests of the members of the House have been preserved.

I might also say, Mr. Speaker, that today is an interesting day. Knowing that Bill 11 – no, I can't say that because I don't know if they knew that Bill 11 was coming. On Monday the Official Opposition designated this afternoon to hear and deal with the estimates of the Premier, and this thus necessitated his presence in the House this afternoon to deal with those estimates. So when they say that the technical briefing could happen after, they know full well that they've arranged for that not to be the case and that the Premier would have to be in the House this afternoon. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Government House Leader, please. Thank you.

Hon. members, the chair was quite happy to go along with life the way it was until he was given notice of an order of a motion of contempt. The chair's indicated that he views this as very, very serious, so the chair will hear the arguments, and if we're here until 5:30 hearing the arguments, so be it.

If an hon. member wants to raise this kind of question, then this chair will not deal with it until he has afforded himself every opportunity to get all the information with respect to it. At this point in time he's not sure what we're even talking about. We've got some discussions. Standing Order 15(4) says, "If the member whose conduct is called into question is not present" – well, I'm not sure who that is – "the matter shall be . . ." et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

So I'm listening very attentively. This was raised.

Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure that I have much more to say in light of what you've said. Clearly the provisions of Standing Order 15 haven't been dealt with. No member's conduct has been called into question. I dealt with some of the substantive matters as to the issues raised in terms of what happened at a meeting earlier in the day, but I'm not sure I know exactly what contempt is being called into question here.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, I invite you to come back to assist me with respect to this. I clearly am reading *Erskine May*. I've looked at *Erskine May*. If some member's conduct is being called into question, it is very important we deal with that. That member should be named, and one will have to get all the other information.

Now, I gather that the comments you made about, quote, assault are not pertinent. Please help me with that one as well.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I was in this fix. I wanted to raise it as quickly as possible so as not to prejudice the claim. I would be happy to prepare a detailed written submission in fact with affidavits from those who were present to be able to particularize precisely what happened. I can identify those government employees who were involved. I'd mentioned that the Member for Calgary-Glenmore was apparently chairing the meeting. That was my observation. I would like the opportunity to be able to put together the kind of detailed material that obviously I haven't been able to now.

I've given notice of it, and the province now understands the basis of the claim. I'd be happy to particularize it because it is a serious matter, and I'd like to be able to marshal the authorities and put the facts before you in a way that I think is indisputable. I'd appreciate that opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is a matter that we will return to in this Assembly at the conclusion of question period on Monday, and the arguments will be raised in this Assembly to be heard by all members. If in fact there is a point of privilege, it will in essence be all members who will judge.

The hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan on a point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Orders 23(h) and (i): making allegations against another member and imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. As you'll recall, during the tablings the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie tabled a document and made some comments prior to tabling it. The statement that I heard towards the end of her comments was something to the effect that I would not file on behalf of the residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan the document that she was tabling at that time.

Mr. Speaker, I would expect more from an elected member, because I would expect it's an elected member's responsibility to verify and fully portray the truth of statements in this Legislature. Never did that member speak to me about the possibility of filing this and that she would have to do it on my behalf or on behalf of the residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan.

It may be a true statement that some people in Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan thought I may not file that petition, but I think, rather, that it's an attempt to diminish the efforts of another member to represent their constituency. In fact, I met with concerned residents of the Brookville area last evening discussing this gas well issue.

This, Mr. Speaker, is similar to schoolyard behaviour that was exhibited during my former career, in which sometimes children would hope to spread rumours to somehow perhaps break up friendships and have some perceived personal gain. These allegations were perhaps just repeated by the member, but the member has the responsibility not to repeat unfounded, unsubstantiated, unvalidated, and untrue allegations.

3:30

Mr. Speaker, if you're reading the Blues, you'll notice that the Blues state: "102 people who live in the constituency of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan." I have before me the tabling; 102 signatures are on this tabling. The residents primarily are from Edmonton, Westlock, Devon, Morinville, St. Albert, Sangudo, Fort McMurray, and the adjacent constituency of Sherwood Park. In fact, five

residents of Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan have signed this petition. It clearly says that. The addresses are clearly here.

Mr. Speaker, in light of these allegations, I would ask for a retraction and an apology. This current situation is such that slanderous statements can be made on TV in full view of all the residents of Alberta who wish to view question period during the afternoon and have the opportunity to see a person make these allegations but not to see somebody defend them before this Legislature. In fact, 3 million people in the province had access to that viewing, and this afternoon a few colleagues and even fewer opposition members are here to hear my statement regarding this.

Mr. Speaker, in reference to your comments earlier about things being on TV, I would ask that you would consider that points of order be raised immediately upon them being voiced during question period and during tablings so that we can properly defend ourselves against false allegations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MR. DICKSON: On the point of order. The customs are clear in this Assembly that we take the word of an hon. member. I hear what he says, that in fact he had been prepared to table those petitions. Clearly, on behalf of my colleague I'm certainly prepared to accept his word.

The advice I had received from my colleague was that she'd met with some 70-odd people and had been advised that this member would not present the petition. So that we can be clear and so it's on the record, the member says that it's inaccurate, and I accept his word. I regret and would apologize for anything that may attach to the member that's contrary to what he's told us in the last few moments.

There's little else I can add, Mr. Speaker. Those are my comments.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, on this point. The chair did move his body when he heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie this afternoon make the following comment, and she addressed it to the Speaker:

Mr. Speaker, these people are very concerned about gas wells that are going into the area that they live in, and they are equally concerned that their MLA was not prepared to table this petition in the Legislature.

There was movement rather quickly with that. It was several minutes later, I believe because there was some activity and noise in the House, that the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan did rise and want to deal with the point of order. The administration that we've followed thus far is that hon. members are invited to rise on a point of order but not express what the point of order is, so the chair is in no position to really understand what the point might be at a given time. The chair certainly had anticipated that the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan would be rising on this.

The hon. members here have heard the explanation of the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan and have also heard comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, including what the chair heard was an apology. I hope that the hon. Member for Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan will accept that. I also hope that all members of this particular Assembly will garner something from this.

We deal with policy. Every time an hon. member decides to deal with personality, that hon. member gets into a deeper hole and a deeper hole and a deeper hole. One day soon some hon. member

will be so deep into the hole that that hon. member will not be able to extricate himself or herself and there will be a point of privilege and it will go to a special committee. The hon. member should read what the penalties associated with it are.

This is the highest court in the province of Alberta. The people of this province expect a great deal more from us, and we should not have to deal with stuff like this on a day-to-day basis.

We have another point of order from the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. DICKSON: I'd withdraw that further point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Then a further point of order from the Deputy Government House Leader.

Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Insulting Language

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On his behalf, I believe the point of order was raised under 23(j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The specific reference which he has given me was language used by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora where he used the words in comparing provisions of the bill to "calling dead civilians collateral damage."

Now, we're not talking here about prohibited words in the House, but we are talking again about what you've admonished the House on a number of times, the protocol and the respect with which people hold us in regard in terms of what we do in this House. We do have to be wary of inflammatory or insulting language, language that goes to an extreme, and in this case, I would suggest, an unacceptable extreme. That was the reference on which the Deputy Government House Leader rose on a point of order.

I think it's appropriate and I think it would be appropriate again to admonish the Member for Edmonton-Glenora and all members of the House that we are here to discuss issues in a civilized manner and that it is inappropriate to take language to the extreme, as was done this afternoon in using that quotation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on this point.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to make three points initially. The first point is that what we do in this Chamber often can be summed up as a battle of words. I think I've heard you say that that's what we do here, that instead of shooting bullets back and forth, we use language and we use words.

Mr. Speaker, the second point that I'm going to make is that what's truly offensive to this member is reading a government bill that's trying to sell an idea which I think is so contrary to the public good that it should never see the light of day. So when I see a government that uses its entire weight and its entire treasury to try to market an idea, to try to call it something else than what it is, to be untruthful about what the intent is, then I will use strong language to draw the parallel. When this government tries to pull the wool over the eyes of Albertans by saying that a private hospital is an approved surgical facility, I will use very strong language at every opportunity to point out just how deceitful that is.

The third point that I'll make, Mr. Speaker, is that the reference is a reference that's not unique in terms of trying to draw to the attention of people an extreme contradiction, or oxymoron. When the government of the United States set about its plans to deal with the language of communicating to the American people its policies,

there are some well-documented examples, and “calling dead civilians collateral damage” is only one of several. Perhaps in debate I’ll have an opportunity to use some of the other comparisons and metaphors as we proceed with Bill 11.

MR. DICKSON: Briefly, on this point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to make an observation. I remember after the budget speech I suggested, in adjourning debate, that we’d heard enough hyperbole for one afternoon. It’s fair to say that question period is very much about hyperbole, and I think you would be in an impossible situation to start policing one particular expression and ignore, then, the requirement in the Standing Orders and in *Beauchesne* that answers in question period should not provoke debate.

That’s what I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

3:40

THE SPEAKER: Any other hon. member on this important point of order? Well, we’re going to deal with it though.

The Blues clearly show that one hon. member used the expression referring to “dead civilians [as] collateral damage.” It’s true that there’s nothing in our legacy of expressions used in this House that would deem that this would be unparliamentary, but it’s also true that the rules basically say that we should not use language of a nature likely to cause disorder and not to use inflammatory arguments. It’s also true, as members have said so often this afternoon on these points of order, that there is no debate during question period. I’m going to say that again: there is no debate during question period. I’m going to say it once again: there is no debate during question period.

This book called *Beauchesne’s Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, and there are many others, clearly points out what question period is all about. In the excitement here of coming up to day 7 or day 8 of this session, virtually all questions that have been raised from day one should have been ruled out of order and could have been ruled out of order. Virtually all questions today should have been or could have been ruled out of order.

What are we going to do now that there’s a bill before us? What are you going to start doing Monday? Are you going to debate the bill, ask questions about the bill in question period? Everybody’s going to try and probably going to end up doing it, because that seems to be the mood.

I guess it’s something like a hockey game. If they both want to hit each other over the head and bash their skulls in and go ahead and do it, the referee will let it happen until members decide that there are no players left and only the referee is standing. In this case methinks there are 64 versus 17, so we think that there are more troops left over by the end of the battle than the 16 or 17.

The referee is sort of here to protect everybody and wants to protect everybody. But I would really, really ask. I don’t want to stand up here in these gowns like somebody in a pulpit with a book in his hand saying that this is what you’re doing on a day-to-day basis. This is the Assembly of members. The purpose is to seek information. I mean, I’ve already made the statement about television. Isn’t it amazing when there are no television cameras on? Isn’t this amazing? We could sing and whistle. In fact, some of you even like one another now. Amazing how different it was a couple of hours ago.

I know it’s a plea on my part, and I’m going to make it again and again and again. Could we use less inflammatory language in the questions and in the responses? Could we get personalities out of this? Could we deal with the substance, the issue? The place is called Alberta. It’s not America; it’s not the world, something, something. Alberta. The issue is very clear. That’s what we ask

questions on, and we’ll have ample opportunity for debate, by the way, in second reading, ample opportunity.

I’m not sure. Are there any more points of order for this afternoon?

head: Orders of the Day

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Third Reading

Bill 9

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Provincial Treasurer.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my honour to move for third reading Bill 9, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2000.

We’ve had occasion to deal with this bill already in second reading, of course, and Committee of the Whole. I won’t take the time of the House to say any more to it as it is an interim supply bill, a bill which will afford the government the opportunity to continue in its good work over the course of the period of time after March 31 and until this House sees fit to vote supply under the normal bills of supply under the budget and the process that we’re currently under.

I would commend to the House Bill 9 and ask for support.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. We’ve had an opportunity to discuss some of the faults with Bill 9 and this ongoing, repeated request for interim supply. I won’t repeat some of those arguments, but I will make some statements about our concerns that have to do with the lack of disclosure within supply votes.

I will note that both the Auditor General and the Alberta Financial Review Commission have recommended to the government the separation of operating expenses and capital investments as a means of strengthening managerial accountability. It would also strengthen the opportunities for evaluating the effectiveness of programs and program expenditures. However, despite that advice the government in Bill 9 has collapsed once again operating expenses and capital expenses into a single vote.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

I’ll say that that troubles me deeply because we continually hear the government through its Executive Council members talking about transparency and openness and accountability. In fact, when the Minister of Gaming was presenting and defending his estimates just the other day – Madam Speaker, I believe you were presiding over that meeting – I didn’t count, I lost count, but several times during those debates he talked about: in keeping with this government’s openness, this and something else may happen. Well, here we have a situation where, contrary to any measures of openness and accountability, we see something collapsed together, that can only obscure clarity and can only hide transparency.

Now, a brief history lesson might be in order, Madam Speaker. Before the passage of the Deficit Elimination Act in May of 1993, the practice of appropriating supply and interim supply was to include a program-by-program breakdown of each supply vote. Now, what that means is that, for example, if you were to look at the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act of 1992, there would be separate listings for both capital and operating. This program-by-program

breakdown gave the Legislative Assembly and in fact all taxpayers some assurances that the proper amount of funding, as was set out in the estimates, was being allocated to each program within a department. It didn't allow for any sloppiness or slushiness in how those allocations, first, were going to be made and, secondly, accounted for.

Providing a global figure for each department under the interim supply vote, as requested under this bill, without a breakdown by program and subprogram I believe shows this government's utter contempt for accountability. I think it also shows that they have contempt for their very own words regarding fiscal responsibility. I would request that this government seriously consider going back to the earlier form of presenting interim supply and appropriation requests, that being breaking it down by capital and operating and by program and subprogram.

In the interests of ensuring openness, accountability, and transparency and imposing rigorous fiscal discipline, that the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer and other members of government claim and often refer to, it is necessary to ask all ministers during appropriation on interim supply to provide a breakdown of the interim supply by individual program within each department and then relate that appropriation by individual program to the performance and outcome targets established in the business plan.

Madam Speaker, I won't take the time of the Assembly at this point to go back over all of the difficulties we've had with business plans, the fact that there is very little agreement department by department, that there is little consistency in how outcome measures are presented. Some outcome measures don't seem to be related to some programs. Some programs don't seem to have outcome measures, and all of those other things. I won't repeat all of that. Suffice to say that yet again we see a missing link in this chain of accountability. As is so often the case with this government, you have words and you have deeds, and the legacy of the government of course is the growing gap between.

So with those concerns on the record about Bill 9, I will end my comments and will ask with all sincerity that the government, please, reconsider the presentation of interim supply votes so that Albertans can be given some real assurances about accountability.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

3:50

head: Committee of Supply

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I'll call the Committee of Supply to Order.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Executive Council

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I would call on the hon. Premier to lead off the debate.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman and hon. members. I'm pleased to appear before this committee in my capacity as minister responsible for Executive Council to discuss the three-year business plan and, of course, the estimates. Executive Council's main programs include the office of the Premier/general administration, which provides support to cabinet; the office of the deputy minister; and the office of the Lieutenant Governor. Executive Council also includes the protocol office, which formerly was with the department of international and intergovernmental

affairs; the Public Affairs Bureau, which is responsible for providing two-way communications with Albertans about government programs and services; and the Alberta Corporate Service Centre, which is a new program that will consolidate and provide administrative services to ministries so that they can focus on the delivery of programs and services to Albertans.

Members of the committee will note a new budget item for the new Alberta Corporate Service Centre. The centre will also generate revenue by charging back its costs to ministries, and this will result in no net spending increase.

Madam Chairman, I would like now to discuss some of the programs detailed in this year's business plan, beginning with Executive Council. The role of Executive Council is to co-ordinate the Alberta government's overall direction and to set a broad agenda for government ministries to follow. That overall direction is focused on achieving the vision statement at the front of the government of Alberta's business plan. It states that this government is committed to achieving "a vibrant and prosperous province where Albertans enjoy a superior quality of life and are confident about the future for themselves and their children," and I'm pleased to say that Alberta is well on its way to achieving that vision.

Notwithstanding the criticisms of the opposition Liberals and the NDs, this government has made remarkable strides over the past six years. This province is the envy of other jurisdictions in this country and is renowned worldwide for the steps it has taken to overcome a \$3.4 billion structural deficit, to turn that around, Madam Chairman, to something in the neighbourhood of a \$3 billion to \$4 billion surplus. Over the years we have done a \$30 billion turnaround in this province. Through that exercise, we have still managed to maintain the most competitive tax regime in the country. We have still been able to dedicate ourselves to the priority areas of Albertans, like health and education, and we have made remarkable progress in addressing the pay-down of the debt.

It has been the balanced approach, and it has been a very successful approach. Most importantly, most Albertans understand that. Most Albertans understand and respect that kind of record. I would suggest the only Albertans who don't understand it and can't accept it, because it is a success, are members of the opposition Liberals. So new and carefully targeted plans to ensure Albertans enjoy the best possible future were detailed in my recent televised address, in the new Lieutenant Governor's inaugural Speech from the Throne, and in the Provincial Treasurer's recent budget speech.

By the way, I would allude to the report from Nesbitt Burns. I'm sure there will be other reports from other financial analysts in this province, but the Nesbitt Burns report was particularly telling. It simply said, "Another Day in Paradise."

With overall direction from Executive Council this government is committing itself to creating bold plans for Alberta in this new century. Those plans include a continued commitment to careful fiscal management so that we can continue to pay down debt, so that we can continue to increase government efficiency and redirect more taxpayers' dollars back to programs and services for Albertans; forward-thinking and much-needed tax reforms which have been accelerated from their original schedule to give Albertans real tax relief sooner rather than later; carefully targeted spending on Albertans' priorities, including a 21 percent increase in health spending and a 19 percent increase in education spending over the next three years; and innovative new strategies to ensure that Albertans can continue to meet the challenges of the knowledge-driven global economy.

That, Madam Chairman, is a very brief summary of the overall agenda established by this government for the first years of the new century. It is an agenda that reflects this government's commitment

to providing Albertans with every possible advantage in the 21st century. It is an agenda that reflects the economic realities of the new global economy. Most importantly, it is an agenda that speaks to the priorities of the people we're here to serve.

Turning now to the portion of the business plan that deals with the Public Affairs Bureau, I would like to highlight a number of programs that are closely tied to the needs and priorities of Albertans. First, I'd like to mention a new program that is just completing its first year of operation. It's called Alberta Connects, and it's a program that provides Albertans with an opportunity for effective two-way communications with the government.

You know, Madam Chairman, the people of this province have consistently told us that the most important thing they want from their government is for us to listen and respond to their comments and questions, to reflect their priorities. In fact, when you ask Albertans what good government means, listening is at the very top of the list. Listening. Alberta Connects meets that need. It provides the people of this province with clear facts so that they can form their own opinions about how they want their government to handle various issues, and the best example of that exercise will start on Monday. That's when the bill, in an unprecedented step, will be mailed to every Albertan in this province, to every household in this province to see what they think about the legislation, to put aside all the political rhetoric and, as I have termed it, malicious misinformation that is being spread by the Liberals and the NDs, to let the people decide.

Madam Chairman, that is important. Albertans told us without a doubt that the one thing they want on this bill and on any other issue of importance or priority to them is information, and that's exactly what they're going to get: unemotional, unfettered information. Let's hear from Albertans. Let's hear from Albertans, and let's appeal to the Liberals to give Albertans a chance. Give Albertans a chance.

4:00

Alberta Connects meets the need. It is one of the vehicles, one of the tools to allow Albertans to communicate directly with their government. It provides the people of the province with clear facts so that they can form their own opinions about how they want their government to handle various issues. Alberta Connects offers Albertans fast, convenient, and direct access to the information they need through interactive Internet connections, newspaper and television information, and toll-free phone lines. These services provide Albertans with important information and updates on government programs, initiatives, and recent announcements as well as opportunities to provide government with their comments and questions.

So the government will continue to respond to the needs of the people we serve by continuing to expand on the variety of electronic-based communications operations, opportunities for Albertans. Examples of progress in this area include the virtual forum and moderated on-line discussion groups created as part of last year's Children's Forum. Another example can be found in the real-time Internet broadcast of my most recent televised address which was offered to Albertans in addition to the television format.

Finally under the Public Affairs Bureau, Queen's Printer bookstore staff are working together with Alberta Justice to create a new product called the *Revised Statutes of Alberta 2000*, or *RSA*. This is a considerable undertaking as it involves producing the first full revision of the statutes since the 1980s.

AN HON. MEMBER: Whew.

MR. KLEIN: So in the spring of next year when the revision is complete, the legal and business communities will have access to a

much-needed and valuable legislative resource.

I heard a whew from the Liberals. I take that to mean big deal. Well, it is a big deal, Madam Chairman, to the legal and business communities of this province. If they do not think it is a big deal, then stand up at some point and say so.

Members of the committee will notice a spending increase under the Public Affairs Bureau to fund the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project, and I would ask you to also note that the increases in spending are offset by corresponding increases in revenue due to projected sales of the revised statutes product.

Madam Chairman, I would now like to turn the committee's attention to the protocol office. This is a new addition to Executive Council since we last met, and I think it warrants an introduction. Except for the recent past the protocol office has been located within Executive Council for most of its 30 years of existence, and most recently it was, as I pointed out, with the Department of International and Intergovernmental Affairs.

The protocol office looks after four main areas on behalf of the government as a whole. First, it plans, conducts, and co-ordinates cross-government participation in the meetings, round tables, and various other events connected to the many visits our province receives each year from senior international government officials. Recent examples include visits from the Premier of the People's Republic of China last April, the Governor of Jalisco last year, which is a sister state of ours in Mexico, and Ukraine's minister of health last August.

The office is also responsible for planning and conducting domestic ceremonial events such as the recent installation ceremony for Alberta's new Lieutenant Governor, the recent opening of session, and other events such as the government's annual Remembrance Day ceremonies.

Thirdly, the office answers some 1,500 to 2,000 telephone and written inquiries it receives each year from community groups, individuals, and companies. These questions involve a wide range of protocol questions that come up when planning an official or ceremonial event involving the government or foreign officials.

Finally, the protocol staff are responsible for managing the operation of Government House here in Edmonton. These duties include co-ordinating the facility's use among all government departments, the Premier's office, the office of the Lieutenant Governor, and so on. In all, more than 200 events are held at Government House each year.

I would like to conclude my remarks with some information about another new program that has been added to Executive Council's business plan, and that is the Alberta Corporate Service Centre. This shared service centre is designed to increase government efficiency in areas like finance, human resources, information technology, and general administration while freeing up more resources for frontline services to Albertans. Services delivered by the centre will focus on cross-government transactional functions and services like accounts payable, payroll, and mail services. More strategic ministry-specific elements, such as budgeting and forecasting, will stay within individual government ministries.

It's important to note that the idea of shared services is not uncharted territory. Many public- and private-sector organizations both here in Canada and abroad use various shared services models. In fact, some 20 percent of Fortune 500 companies have moved to shared service delivery. Examples of organizations that have successfully made the move to shared services include the government of Ontario, the government of Manitoba, and right here the city of Edmonton. We've seen from these examples that a shared service approach can result in savings and increased efficiency as well as proven value for customers.

The government business plan states that the centre will work to establish key priorities by April 2000 and to consolidate 80 percent of transactional administrative services by the end of this year. The centre has also established goals to achieve a 5 percent savings in its first year and a 20 percent savings over three years. Those savings, Madam Chairman, will then be directed back toward providing frontline services for Albertans. It's expected that most of the 20 percent savings will be achieved by reducing duplication and overlap of services rather than by reducing numbers of employees.

However, even if you assume that moving to shared services will result in fewer government positions, the actual number of people affected would be about 95 per year over three years. The overall impact across government would be minimal, especially when you consider that government normally loses some 5 percent of staff to attrition every year and that staff in these areas will have ample opportunity to apply for positions that open up through attrition. We have been communicating with government staff as the process unfolds and will continue to ensure that any staff affected by the move to a shared services model receive timely information updates. Government has also committed to maximizing employment opportunities available to any staff affected by the move.

So, Madam Chairman, that concludes my introductory remarks on Executive Council's business plan for 2000 through 2003. Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to start off by thanking the Premier for rearranging his schedule so he could join with us this afternoon, and I'm glad that the Premier was wide-ranging in his comments, because that'll give us an opportunity to explore the many themes and direction of government.

The Premier started off by saying that he was here to discuss the three-year business plan and estimates of Executive Council, of which he is the minister responsible, and then he went on to provide us with some other information. I want to focus on a couple of things initially and ask the Premier to comment on them, but first I want to talk about the *Revised Statutes of Alberta* project, *RSA 2000*.

4:10

When the Premier was introducing the project to the Assembly just now, he made reference that he heard a whew, I believe he said, coming from the benches of the Official Opposition. I can assure the Premier that that was a yelp of appreciation for the project. As a matter of fact, if he had looked up from his notes for a minute, he would have seen me giving a thumbs-up to the Minister of Justice, and I think the Minister of Justice, knowing him as I do, will attest to that. We think it's important – and of course that's a theme we explored today in question period – for all Albertans to be able to have access to all legislation and all regulations and all statutes so that they can reach their own conclusions.

The Premier talked as well about this unprecedented mail-out of Bill 11 to every Alberta household, saying that he wants all Albertans to read it for themselves. He made the usual rhetorical comments about malicious misinformation and the role of the opposition parties, and we'll come back to the theme of malicious misinformation and the role of the government in just a minute.

I do want to say that I am one hundred percent behind the Premier mailing out Bill 11 to every household in this province. While it's sort of like a Hail Mary pass in the dying seconds of a football game – and, you know, I think everybody sees that it's that sort of desperation that's driving the government to do this. I'm glad,

because the one thing I hear from Albertans, from my own constituents, from other men and women that I talk to from across this province, is that there is a lack of understanding about why the government wants to go down this crazy path of privatizing health care. They will get a chance to read the bill, and they'll see for themselves the loopholes that you could drive a private surgical facility through. That's exactly what they will discover. So I want to thank the Premier because as a member of the opposition, whose responsibility is to hold this government accountable for only pursuing the public good, it makes my job tremendously more easy that every Albertan will have access with their morning coffee to this ill-conceived legislation. It's destined to go the way of its brother legislation, Bill 37, and the son of Bill 37.

MR. KLEIN: Don't bet on it.

MR. SAPERS: The Premier is taunting, "Don't bet on it." Well, I do trust Albertans, unlike the Premier, and I will bet that they are going to rise up against this legislation and they're going to tell this government to put this legislation where it belongs, which is in the trash heap. So thank you for doing that, Mr. Premier. It makes my job easier.

Now, on to some other comments that the Premier made. I'd like to ask the Premier if he would comment on this. He mentioned the tax plan of the provincial government, I think under the category of bold new plans. I'm sure that's a phrase we're going to hear lots of leading up to the next election. I can see it now: bold new plans. Maybe we could just shorten it to BNP – and we'll all know what the Premier is talking about – so that he can just say: oh, well, it's BNP. Then, you know, it'll shorten the debate up a little bit. But in the realm of BNP he mentioned these bold plans for taxation.

Mr. Premier, I wonder if you will comment on why it is that the federal government in unveiling its tax plans for Canadians was able to dedicate 42 percent of its surplus, of its economic and fiscal dividend, to tax reduction and tax relief, yet the province of Alberta, which I would argue is in perhaps even better financial shape than the federal Treasury, was only able to dedicate 12 percent of its surplus to the same end. If you're going to talk about balance, maybe you will talk about why that seems to be so much out of balance, particularly given that in the spending estimates and the revenue projections for the government we still see a tremendous lowballing of the resource revenue which we expect to receive. In my calculations, Mr. Premier, it's a good \$600 million or \$700 million short just in terms of oil and gas. So if you simply used that reality-based forecasting for your revenue side, I think you and your government could in fact have been bold when it came to tax reduction.

We'll also of course, Mr. Premier, be looking forward to your comments on the 11 percent flat tax and how it is going to unfairly impact low-income earners and middle-income earners and in particular, because of the bold initiatives of the federal government, how it is that you're going to try to justify your flat tax, which will actually create higher levels of taxation for many Alberta taxpayers.

Now, Mr. Premier, you also mentioned the role of the protocol office, and I was particularly interested in your references to Government House. I very proudly represent the constituency of Edmonton-Glenora, and of course, as you know, every time you visit Government House, you visit the heart of my constituency. Thanks for bringing all that business into my part of town.

You talk about the 200 events that happen at Government House. You know, it has always sort of surprised me that as the MLA for the area I have been denied, actually, using Government House for functions. I'd just like you to tell me what the policy coming out of

Executive Council is, seeing as it's responsible for the protocol office, for the utilization of Government House. How is it booked? What events are allowed in? What events are excluded, and what's the role of the local MLA, regardless of political affiliation, in terms of hosting events at Government House? I'd be curious to hear the policy articulated on that.

Now, Madam Chairman, through you to the Premier I have some specific questions regarding the business plan of Executive Council. As the Premier probably knows from earlier discussions that we've had and that I've had with members of his cabinet, I have a particular interest in performance measures, so I will direct the Premier's attention to the performance measures in Executive Council. If I count correctly, there are five, the fifth one being a brand-new one dealing with maintenance of revenue.

Let me start with this brand-new one, because I was kind of excited to see that. What it says is, "It compares authorized revenue projections with the results actually achieved." What we're going to see is that in every year that the measure accounts for, the actual and the target are different and – surprise, surprise, surprise – for every year the actual revenue achieved is higher.

Now, I may be missing something here, and I'll hope that the Premier will tell me what it is that I'm missing, because I know he's not shy of telling me what it is that I don't know. Maybe he will tell me why it is that there's now a performance measure that's going to measure the error of government forecasting. I mean, it's been the assertion of the Official Opposition for some time that this government purposely lowballs forecast revenue so that it can alternately argue either that the cupboard is bare and that's why we have to cut back and tighten the belt, or it can say: well, we've got a dividend, and we're going to put it into core programs and services. Of course, what that says to taxpayers is: we're going to pick your pocket for as much revenue as we can, we're going to hoard it for a while, and then as we get dangerously close to elections, we'll start talking about election plans. I'm amazed, frankly, that the government would actually create a performance measure that tries to somehow quantify this kind of shell game. I notice that the forecasts aren't included for the years 2000 through to 2003, just the targets.

Now, if we flip that around, the target is actually the forecast in the Treasury business plan. So when I say shell game, I use that phrase quite on purpose, because you have the Executive Council showing a target number for revenue which is in fact a forecast in a different business plan of a different part of government. I'm very curious about this new performance measure, and I hope the Premier will have a chance to tell us about it.

Now, if I look at the other performance measures, we have "Public Satisfaction with Government Information." The target is that 75 percent of people who ask for information will be satisfied. I'm glad to see that it's actually been set above the actual, but what worries me is that since 1995 the actual hasn't really gone up. It was 69 percent satisfaction in '95, went down to 66 percent in '96, stayed at 66 percent in '97, climbed back up to 69 percent for 1998-99, and now we're going to see that three-quarters of Albertans will actually be satisfied with information. Will the Premier tell us what specific strategies he is going to put in place to ensure that there is this growth in public satisfaction with government information, seeing as he has been singularly unsuccessful in getting it up to the target over the last four years?

4:20

I'd also like to question the public satisfaction with RITE and Queen's Printer bookstores measure. It relates to "the satisfaction levels of Albertans using the RITE Telephone System to access government and obtain information." What I'm wondering about is:

why isn't there also a measure here that has to do with other means of accessing government information? The Premier did go to some length to tell us about these new electronic means of contact as well as the consultations, and I think he made reference to this latest propaganda piece: we're going to tell you what we heard or what we think you said or whatever it is that this health document is going to be called that's going to be mailed out. Why aren't there satisfaction measures that also look at satisfaction with accessibility through the Internet, the feedback obtained through roundtable and consultation processes? I mean, this is after all the government that talks about and prides itself on consultation. You know, this government has never met an issue that it didn't think it could meet with a roundtable or a summit, so I would expect to see some measures of satisfaction on those things as well.

Specifically, Mr. Premier, what I'm talking about is satisfaction measures dealing with electronic access to government information and also feedback measures on satisfaction with things like the First Circle consultation on children or the health summit or the justice summit or so many of the other initiatives that you talk about but that we don't actually see honest, third-party, quantifiable, measurable results on.

The next performance measure is, of course, "Government Client Satisfaction," which is the measure of "satisfaction levels with the communications services provided by the Public Affairs Bureau." What I see there is that there's about a 90 percent, give or take a point or two, target and achieved result. This one has always amused me, because these are the people who I'm assuming your government leaks things to – those would be the clients – and then you're going to ask them if they're happy about I guess the relationship or the quality of information. So it's government client satisfaction levels with communications services. Unless, of course, it's the internal measure, which is: what kinds of services does PAB provide to other government departments?

Again, I wonder who it is that fills out the responses on these surveys. Maybe what the Premier could do is tell us how these client satisfaction measurements are achieved. Maybe he'd even be so bold, in keeping with his theme, as to bring the surveys into the Assembly and table them for us so we could see the actual instruments that are used to come up with these measurements, because of course the measurements are just sort of out there, like the claim that we're not going to try to destroy public health care. They're just sort of out there. They're not really attached to anything concrete.

The last, of course, is "Customer Satisfaction with Products," and I see that there's again a very high achievement here, 98 percent. Congratulations, but I just wish I understood what it meant. It says, again, that this is a new measure that's related to the

revised goal of delivering products and services that allow us to meet or exceed revenue projections and customer needs. It rates the satisfaction . . . of Queen's Printer Bookstore customers with the products available.

Well, is that simply a duplication of the public satisfaction measure that's up above? If it's different, how is it different? Again, Mr. Premier, it would sure be helpful to see who it is that you collect information from. I mean, if you only ask one person and they say, "Yeah, I'm about 98 percent satisfied," is that how the measure gets into the business plan? I think some more explanation would be in order.

Of course, it would be nice if all of the performance measures were consistent throughout all of the business plans and then the reporting on all the performance measures was consistent, because, you know, presentation is important in terms of understanding continuity of services across government, and it also helps us move year to year and see whether things are truly improving or not.

Perhaps of most interest when it comes to the business plans, Mr. Premier, are performance measures that aren't in the business plan,

and I'd like to give you some advice as to what I believe might be helpful performance measures for you to include.

One might be a measure of correspondence satisfaction with Executive Council or the Premier's office: volume of letters received, how they're responded to, what kind of feedback you're getting from those clients. I say this, Mr. Premier, not to create work or give the impression that you don't respond to letters and cards. I also am fully aware of the volume that must come through your office because I know what comes through my office, and I can only extrapolate from what I get to what you may receive.

Some of the feedback I get, Mr. Premier, is, "I never hear back, or when I do, they're rude," or "I get a form letter, and it wasn't even on the issue that I wrote about," those kinds of things. So if I'm getting that kind of feedback, I'm certain that you're getting that kind of feedback. I'm equally certain that you would want to know about it and do something about it so you may be able to report to Albertans that in fact you're serious about responding to the kinds of written inquiries they provide to you, and you may want to develop a performance measure to capture that.

The second thing that you may want to do, Mr. Premier, is to have a performance measure dealing with compliance with freedom of information and protection of privacy applications. After all, it wasn't that long ago that your office was found in breach of the law governing freedom of information.

You look puzzled, Mr. Premier. It had to do with the response from your office that you in fact had no documents relating to the West Edmonton Mall refinancing in the possession of Executive Council. Of course, we all know that that wasn't the case, and when the Privacy Commissioner was called in to investigate the lack of responsiveness from Executive Council, he wrote a report which in fact found that your office was in breach of the law but then suggested that there may be some reasons that had to do with lack of staff, lack of training, or perhaps even Christmas schedules. So that record has been made available to you in the past.

So my question is: why do you not have a performance measure here that would indicate your office's compliance with FOIP? How many requests come into your office? How many are dealt with within the allocated time frames? How many are appealed? How many appeals are upheld? How many are denied? How many in the first instance are responded to, et cetera?

Thirdly, you may want to have a performance measure on the government's defence of public institutions, maybe some measure of support for things like our justice system, our public health care system, our education system, et cetera, because of course many Albertans have expressed to me their concern that there seems to be an erosion of public institutions.

Now, most interestingly what I would like to see is a performance measure of a truth and accuracy scale on the work of the PAB. I'll tell you why that is, Madam Chairman. It's because I'm looking at a newspaper ad that was in the *Edmonton Examiner* on February 18, 2000, and it goes on to talk about many things that at one point may be law. It's a newspaper ad of the government of Alberta. It's a full page, and it talks about things like "the . . . Government is taking firm action on tax reform," and it talks about things that will be put into place. But, of course, all of this hasn't become law yet, Mr. Premier, so this is very misleading. You're telling Albertans in this ad that these are in fact the facts, that these are things that are happening, and it's all before the Assembly. It hasn't been voted on, and who knows, Mr. Premier? You might be convinced that some of your initiatives are wrong, just like Bill 26 was wrong and Bill 37 was wrong.

You know, the other thing is that there is some very malicious – what is the phrase you use? Malicious and misleading information? Well, there's some very malicious and misleading information right

here in this ad published by the government where the province of Alberta claims that the federal government only contributes 13 cents of every dollar for health care. Well, Mr. Premier, that's not true. You know very well that there are two components. One component is tax points; the other is cash. It doesn't make any distinction . . . [Mr. Saper's speaking time expired]

Oh, unanimous consent to continue.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Time has expired.

I would ask for unanimous consent of the committee to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

4:30

head: Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Okay. First, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all Members in the Legislative Assembly visitors from the Thompson colony in Fort Macleod, which is in southern Alberta. They are Bill and Ruth Tschetter. They are seated in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they now stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: I understand the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning has an introduction as well.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a teacher from McNally high school on the south side. He taught one of my sons. His name is Roger Bartsch. He's up in the public gallery. I'd like the chairman to allow that he stand and ask, with permission, that we warmly welcome him to the House.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: And one more. The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly two people that were briefly introduced before with the delegation from the School of Hope, but I'd also like to introduce to the Assembly Frans and Steina Feyter and their sons who are accompanying them today. Frans is the owner of Frans Feyter Construction, structural truss systems, in Fort Macleod, and his wife, Steina, is involved in many groups and activities in Fort Macleod and district. They have with them today their youngest son, George, who is a student at Emmanuel Christian school in Monarch, a very impressionable young man, and of course their other son, Lorne, was introduced earlier today. They are seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Main Estimates 2000-2001

Executive Council (continued)

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the chairman would ask for your direction. Do you wish to – yes, you do.

MR. KLEIN: I don't mind responding, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, relative to the reduction in transfer grants for the Canada health and social transfer to which the hon. member alludes, by suggesting that we're misleading the Alberta public, he is also suggesting that every Premier and every territorial leader in this country is also misleading their people, because we are all agreed on this particular issue. So he is placing in doubt the word of all the treasury departments of all the provinces in this country, including Liberal governments. [interjections] Well, maybe this hon. member will stand up and tell the Alberta public how good of a deal we're getting from the federal government.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the hon. member has risen on a point of order.

**Point of Order
Allegations against a Member**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Standing Order 23(h),(i), and (j). I believe the Premier made allegations because he said "this hon. member" and he pointed at me. I think it's clear and let the record show that he was referring to the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, that I was calling into question the veracity of the Premiers outside of Alberta, and I never used those words. I never said that the Premiers outside of Alberta were misleading the Alberta public. I only said that there was one government that was misleading the citizens of this province, and that's the government of Alberta under this Premier.

Now, if the Premier wants to put words in my mouth, I guess he can. That's his right. He can try to twist anything he wants. But the fact is that I'm talking about this government, and frankly what other governments tell their citizens is not my concern. I wasn't elected to represent anyone but the electors in Edmonton-Glenora.

So my point is simply this. The government of Alberta has used taxpayers' money to buy an ad that was in for at least one day in one local newspaper in Edmonton that says that only 13 cents of federal contributions – in fact, I'll read it. "For every dollar spent on health care in Alberta, the province contributes 87 cents while the federal government pays less than 13 cents."

Now, in fact there are two elements to the Canada health and social transfer, a cash element and a tax . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: On the point of order. This is on the point of order.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, this is on the point. Absolutely. This Premier wants to try to twist my words. He can sit here and listen to the truth.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, I think you actually have made your point, and now you are basically debating this. I mean, a point of order should be short, to the fact, succinct, and not a speech.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Chairman, you're absolutely right. I'll submit that there's no point of order, and I'll debate with the Premier any time this point when it's appropriate to debate it.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, it's a good thing that you withdrew the point of order because the chair . . .

MR. SAPERS: No, I didn't withdraw it. I said that there's no point of order. That was my submission.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The chair was going to say that what there is here is a difference of opinion.

MR. KLEIN: Do we still have a point of order?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Go ahead, hon. Premier. Continue.

Debate Continued

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, the facts speak for themselves. We are now paying 87 percent of the cost of health care in this province. What we have said is that while every other provincial jurisdiction in this country has restored money in a very significant manner to health care and to education and to advanced education, the only level of government that hasn't made a significant restoration to these priority areas is the federal government.

That is the point that we're trying to make, and I would think that if the hon. member wants to put his political skills to use, then he should be talking to his friends in Ottawa, his Liberal friends in Ottawa, to encourage them to do as Premier Bouchard has asked all the Premiers to do and has on our behalf written a letter to the Prime Minister saying that we need to sit down with the Prime Minister as Premiers to discuss this issue and to discuss the very insignificant amount that is now flowing through CHST to health care in particular and to a lesser degree to advanced education. Every single Premier in this country agrees that the funding is absolutely inadequate. It has gone down and down and down, and there has not been anywhere near full restoration of CHST funding for health and welfare. That is the point.

MR. SAPERS: Well, because it's wrong.

MR. KLEIN: It is not wrong, Madam Chairman.

There were a number of questions that were asked. One pertained to the use of Government House. Now, this is about my – what? – eighth or ninth time in estimates. First of all, I will have to remind the Liberals that they are not government, thank God. Government House is Government House, and there is a protocol, Madam Chairman. The use of this facility is allocated on the basis of seniority in terms of government business. Government business, not opposition business. They are not the government. Government House is for government business.

MR. SAPERS: What about elected representatives?

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, they have never come to the realization that they are not government. They have been sitting in the opposition for so long that perhaps they're dreaming about being government, but they are not government.

There is an allocation on the basis of seniority. This begins with the Lieutenant Governor's office. The Premier's office follows. Ministers and their offices follow, then deputy ministers, government committees, and the caucus of government. Of government. Government decides how Government House is to be used, and it is not to be used by members of the opposition, although we put it out to charitable organizations and people who want to do good in the community. We think that's the right thing to do, and that's why we don't give it out to the Liberals.

Oh, I'm sorry. I have some other answers.

MR. SAPERS: No. You sat down.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, do you want to hear the answers to the questions?

4:40

MR. KLEIN: I do recognize and appreciate the comments that were made by the FOIP Commissioner relative to another question that was asked by the hon. member. The FOIP Commissioner also said that it was – and I have to paraphrase this – not a serious breach. It was not a serious breach. But in light of what the FOIP Commissioner reported to my office, I am pleased to inform the hon. member of the opposition that the office of Executive Council first of all attaches a great deal of importance to FOIP requests. We do get a lot in government, and I can tell you, Madam Chairman, that most of them come from the Liberal opposition.

You know, FOIP was set up to really accommodate the general public, and it was never set up to be used as a political tool by the opposition at their whim and at great expense, by the way, to the taxpayer. Nonetheless, the FOIP Commissioner examines every request. All the ministries examine every request. We do attach importance to FOIP requests, so much so, Madam Chairman, that we have now appointed a FOIP co-ordinator within Executive Council. We used to let all of the ministries look after the various FOIP requests, and it will be the task of that individual to handle any requests for government information as expediently as possible. So we have taken the FOIP Commissioner's advice and have appointed a FOIP co-ordinator within Executive Council, and hopefully in the future we can accommodate the hon. member and his colleagues in a much more expeditious manner.

The client satisfaction question, the target of 90 percent and the actual of 89 percent. Well, that's pretty darn close to me. If I'm trying to achieve 90 percent and I achieve 89 percent, I think that's pretty darn good.

How is it done? Basically, surveys were sent to more than 500 clients in government departments, and this measure relates to client satisfaction with communications services provided by the bureau staff to the various government departments. Eighty-nine percent out of a target of 90 I think is – well, it's more than a pass. It's about as close to perfect as you can get.

A question was why the federal government dedicated 42 percent to tax relief while Alberta only dedicates 12 percent to tax relief, that this appears to be out of balance. Madam Chairman, this province, first of all, has been hailed across the country – and I allude again to Nesbitt Burns – for its groundbreaking actions on taxes. There have been significant tax reductions in the past. We do now have the lowest overall taxes in Canada, and we intend to keep it that way.

You know, I would like to quote from an article, and it's from a person from Hythe, Alberta, just west of Grande Prairie. It says:

Quit whining, Albertans! Everyone is carping at the Klein government complaining about everything from health care to fault-finding in this realistic provincial budget.

Worst of all, no one seems to realize and be grateful to be living in the foremost province in Canada, resulting in good part from the planning of this government.

Now, this is the important part. This is the important part, and the hon. member may have read recently about people in Fort St. John and Dawson Creek petitioning the Alberta government to join this province because they want to get rid of the kind of socialism that has become so prevalent within the Liberal Party of Alberta. They want to get away from that kind of thing. [interjections] No. These people outsocialism the NDs for sure. You know, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona should be watching out for himself. These guys are really, really creeping in there.

Anyway, she says:

My husband and I recently moved to Alberta from British Columbia

to take advantage of the many benefits which Alberta offers and because the future is actually being planned for. This must be the only province which has a government that actually plans for the future; for example . . .

And I was going to mention that in my remarks.

. . . the \$500-million endowment fund for science and engineering research.

That is planning for the future. She goes on to say:

Even before this budget, Alberta offers: lower provincial taxes, no provincial sales tax, reasonable and competitive (private) insurance for vehicles and homes, good health care – yes, much better than in B.C., lots of jobs, plus strong and healthy conditions for businesses and investment. And there is more. Try living in any of the other provinces for one year, particularly your western neighbour, and you'll come back happily and humbly to Alberta.

Just as with children and their relationship with responsible parents, it's time for the "children" of Alberta to quite whining and start appreciating what you have.

I think what it exemplifies mostly is not the children – our children are very, very bright – but the whiners of Alberta, to start appreciating what you have. And that is from Diane Schuller from Hythe, Alberta, who just moved here from British Columbia to take in the Alberta advantage.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the table would request that you table that document. Would that be fine?

MR. KLEIN: Oh, fine.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: For real?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: For real.

MR. SAPERS: Oh, good. I'm so happy that the Premier found one newspaper article that supports him, and I'm so happy that he found one letter to read out in the Assembly that supports him, because I was thinking he would be feeling very, very lonely and very, very under siege because of the thousands and thousands and thousands of letters that he's received, that I've received, that we've all received that don't share those sentiments. So good on the Premier for finding that one example. You know, that shows that he searched, that he worked really hard, so that's good.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. member, if the chair were to close her eyes here and really think about all of this, it sounds to me like it's question period. I thought that we were dealing with the estimates for Executive Council. Can we get back on track, please.

4:50

MR. SAPERS: Madam Chairman, you know I will always heel to your command, and I know that the Premier will too, but having allowed him to read that into the record, then obviously I have the right to respond.

Now, the Premier talked about the protocol for Government House, and I'd like to ask him a further question about that, because as he went through the list of priorities and took the opportunity to try to be clever and be dismissive and to say that the Liberals will be this and the Liberals won't be that – it's nice to know that we weigh so heavily on his mind.

The issue here, Madam Chairman, is this. Way down on that list of priorities of who may or who may not be allowed to book

Government House, he got to where he said members of the government caucus, and he made a big deal out of the fact that they were in the government caucus. Maybe all of the private members, like yourself, Madam Chairman, who are not in cabinet, would like to think of themselves as members of Executive Council, and maybe every one of those backbenchers there had those daydreams of being a cabinet minister. In fact, "government" is defined by those members of Executive Council.

So really what we have in the Assembly are two kinds of members: members of government – i.e. cabinet ministers, members of Executive Council – and the rest of us mere mortals are private members. Given that the protocol says that private members, as I take it, because that's what the Premier just said, can use Government House, then I would assume that's all private members. Now, I will take it, Madam Chairman, that those private members, particularly those who think they can park anywhere, would believe that they should come first on the list of who can use Government House, but certainly the policy would have to expand to include all private members. So I'll look forward to the opportunity of going to a reception, perhaps hosted by the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, in Government House, and he'll get on that priority list because that's what the Premier just said. Unless, of course, he has now deputized everybody and made them all members of Executive Council, i.e. government. So he maybe ought to get his story straight.

Let me get back to the government's misrepresentation of the truth in paid advertisement, paid for with taxpayers' dollars, and his point about the Canada health and social transfer. Federal transfers to the province of Alberta are going to be \$2.7 billion, \$2.8 billion next year. The Premier would have us believe that it's only going to be about \$1.3 billion. It's \$2.7 billion or \$2.8 billion. [interjection] No. This year, Mr. Premier, actually, because you have to factor in, to be fair, tax points and cash. In fact, \$1.4 billion is coming in in tax points. So the real number is 25 cents of every health care dollar in Alberta comes from the federal government.

Now, this is where I will join in common cause with the Premier. Any time he wants to accompany me when I meet with members of the federal government, I'd be happy to have him come along so that he can join in common cause with members of the Official Opposition in appropriately lobbying the federal government, instead of taking cheap political shots at them, to increase its support for these priority areas such as postsecondary education and public health care. I'd be happy to do that because I'm not satisfied that a 25 percent contribution is enough from the federal government. I'd like to see more, and I'd like to see the Premier being helpful in pursuing that instead of playing politics with the health care of Albertans. But I do say that if we're going to spend taxpayer's money on advertisements, Madam Chairman, they at least ought to tell the truth.

The other thing that I'd like to know about these advertisements, Madam Chairman, is exactly what the point was of putting out these advertisements and spending all of this money if, in fact, they weren't going to be factual. There are several examples in this one ad where claims are made that cannot be supported in truth. In fact, many of these initiatives have not yet become the law of this province. So if he's not willing to stand and apologize for this abuse of taxpayer's money, maybe the least the Premier will do, with his tail tucked between his legs, is go back to the Public Affairs Bureau and tell them to only put out fact when they're advertising a report to Albertans.

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, they are facts. They are facts, and they're facts that have been agreed upon by all the Premiers of all the provinces in this country. This hon. member will hopefully

never be in the position to attend a Premiers' Conference or to even be a representative of a government that attends a Premiers' Conference. But if he could sit in and hear the concerns being expressed about the lack of money that is now flowing through the Canada health and social transfer and the general agreement on the figure, that generally funding has decreased to the point where they, the feds, are now paying about 13 percent in real dollars toward health and advanced education in particular, then I think he might be more convinced that all the treasuries and all the treasurers and all the officials who work in the treasury departments of all the provinces in this country can't be wrong.

But, you know, this hon. member thinks that he's so right all the time and that everyone else is wrong. He must think that 70 percent of Albertans are wrong when they voted for this government, Madam Chairman. [interjections] No, they aren't. They are right. They know what they're doing. They know what they're doing.

MRS. McCLELLAN: You touched a raw spot.

MR. KLEIN: Oh, I touched a raw spot, I guess. Well, there were enough to elect 64 of us, Madam Chairman. Right. You know, there are a lot more of us than there are of them, and that was through the will of Albertans. That's because we have been open, we have been honest, we have been accessible, we listen to people, and we don't go out there with malicious misinformation.

MR. SAPERS: Yes, you do. You even pay for it out of the taxpayers' money.

MR. KLEIN: Madam Chairman, if this hon. member wants to talk about advertisements, I would like to get an advertisement that was put in the paper by the leader of the Liberal opposition, and that will be the proof of the pudding that indeed the misinformation out there is in fact malicious and at taxpayers' expense.

Of course, Madam Chairman, these people are not FOIPable. They do not have to be accountable. Here this hon. member asked for the use of Government House, and they aren't accountable for anything. They aren't FOIPable. They don't have to share anything. They have nothing to share, absolutely nothing to share other than misinformation. They are not FOIPable. They are not subject to the rules of government, yet they want to have all the privileges of government. They have never been elected to be the government, yet they want all the privileges of government. They are members of the opposition. They are not government.

MS OLSEN: What's your point?

MR. KLEIN: The point is that you are not government, thank God.

Madam Chairman, I'll put the question. If, God forbid, they ever became the government . . .

MRS. McCLELLAN: Oh, no. Don't even think it.

MR. KLEIN: No, no. I wouldn't even contemplate that.

. . . would they allow us to go over to Government House and hang around while they have their caucus and, you know, participate in the business of government? I think not. Not if they act like Liberal parties in any other jurisdiction in this country. I think not. So let's not try to bamboozle the people.

You see, Madam Chairman, they can make any statement they want and they don't have to be accountable. That is the difference between the opposition and government. We have to be accountable, and we are.

Madam Chairman, just to demonstrate and to illustrate how little

knowledge this hon. member has as to how government works and the volume of mail that I have to answer – lately there's been a lot of mail. There's been a lot of mail, and yes, it has been on the health care issue, and yes, I answer every letter. But clearly three-quarters of those letters are in response to cards, mail-in cards where people don't have to put down their thoughts and their ideas or think about it. These were cards that were sent out by CUPE. I would suspect they were form letters. Many, many, many of them were form letters that were taken right out of the ads of the Friends of Medicare.

5:00

MR. SAPERS: It does work. Advertising works.

MR. KLEIN: Advertising obviously does work, and I would imagine many of the letters were spurred on by the false and malicious advertising that was put in the papers by the Liberal Party at taxpayers' expense.

So, yes, I sit down, and I personally sign every one of those letters, and I don't use one of those machines, Madam Chairman. So questioned why we did not have a performance measure on correspondence satisfaction: the office of the Premier receives approximately 18,000 pieces of correspondence per year, and every piece of correspondence we receive receives a reply. The only time that we did not send out individual replies was during the week of the Vriend decision being read into the Alberta human rights act. We simply could not handle the volume of mail. It was absolutely horrendous, and I had to make a statement that there would be no reply, that we would do the right thing and we would accept that ruling.

MS OLSEN: You weren't quite sure what to say on that one.

MR. KLEIN: We did the right thing. Do you not think we did the right thing? Do you not think? [interjections] Well, then, thank you.

The office of the Premier receives approximately 18,000 pieces of correspondence per year, all of which receive a response either from myself, the director of operations, the director of scheduling. Some are detailed responses and some are general and some are redirected to ministers and MLAs for a more detailed response. But 18,000 pieces of correspondence.

Yes, we're getting a lot of letters on health care. I do pay attention to the letters, but I also pay attention to what generates the correspondence. Does a mail-out and an organized campaign by the Canadian Union of Public Employees? Is that one of the generators? Does an advertising campaign and an orchestrated petition campaign by the Liberals generate a lot of correspondence? Yes, it does. Does a very organized, orchestrated, and expensive campaign by the Friends of Medicare generate a lot of correspondence? Yes, it does, and that happens from time to time.

As a matter of fact, I'm starting to get a tremendous amount of correspondence on the Genesis development in Kananaskis Country, a matter of great concern. There was a tremendous amount of correspondence when the federal minister in charge of industrial development, I believe, Mr. Manley, announced that he was going to give \$20 million to the NHL, a tremendous amount of mail on that issue saying, "Don't you dare put in any taxpayers' dollars." So it depends, really, on what the issue is as to how much mail I will get on a particular issue, but certainly I'm getting a lot of mail on health care.

First of all, we asked for it. We asked for it when we put out the policy statement. We said for people to respond. Then we were getting some reasonable letters, pro and con and people who simply wanted more information. But as the Friends of Medicare and CUPE and the Liberals started to crank up their ad campaigns, now

I'm getting, you know, a lot of angry letters, but I would suggest that most of those letters are based on false information going out, and for that the Liberals should be ashamed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora on a point of order.

Point of Order Clarification

MR. SAPERS: Yeah, I'm just wondering if the Premier would back that statement up, that most of these letters are based on false information. Is he saying that Albertans can't think for themselves and that when he gets a letter condemning a government initiative, it can't be because they honestly disagree with the government, but it's because they just can't figure it out? Is that what the Premier just said? Back it up.

MR. KLEIN: That is what this member is saying. He is saying that Albertans can't think for themselves, because he opposes and he has some awful words for the bill. We're saying let Albertans decide for themselves what the bill says.

Madam Chairman, when I talk about misleading and malicious advertising, I would suggest that this ad was put in at taxpayers' expense, obviously out of the Liberals' communications budget. I don't know. We can't FOIP them to find out. You know, we can't apply the freedom of information legislation to find out.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier . . .

MR. KLEIN: But Nancy MacBeth here, the Leader of the Official Opposition, says your public health care is at risk. [interjections] That simply is not true. That is false and . . . [interjections]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Hon. Premier, the chair has to deal with the point of order. [interjections] Hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, I am dealing with your point of order.

I think what we've seen here is very great differences of opinion. Also, what I see here is a great deal of debate, and we are sort of veering off from what is before us in Executive Council, so possibly we can get back into the mainstream. I know other members have indicated in this House they wish to speak, and maybe we can deal with the main estimates that are before us.

MR. KLEIN: Can I finish answering the question, Madam Chairman?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Well, we were just dealing with the point of order, so the hon. Premier does have time left in his allocation.

Debate Continued

MR. KLEIN: Well, Madam Chairman, we were talking about the correspondence that I receive and how some of that correspondence comes about. It covers a multitude of issues, literally hundreds of issues that we have to deal with as a government, but some are driven by campaigns. What I'm trying to point out is that the Liberals are part of a campaign.

When I say that the information is misinformation and it is malicious, I mean that. And, yes, that is the kind of thing that creates emotions amongst Albertans. That's the kind of thing that instills fear amongst Albertans, and naturally I get letters when the Leader of the Official Opposition says the Klein government wants to introduce two-tiered, American-style health care. That is false,

that is wrong, and that is simply untrue. That is false and that is malicious.

They say it's not orchestrated. It says: join in the fight to save our public health system; call the Premier; call your MLA. Right. You say that that isn't orchestrated? Who's telling fibs in this House? Who's telling the fibs in this House? It's not this Premier and it's not the members of this caucus, Madam Chairman. It's the Liberals. Their campaign is a malicious one of misinformation.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont. [interjections] Folks, we have had a member from here. It is the hon. Premier's estimates we are talking about. I'm allowing a member over here to ask questions.

MR. HERARD: Madam Chairman, I was enjoying this so much that I really don't know if I should be focusing us back on the estimates, but I certainly look forward to the debate that'll take place in this Chamber next week.

Madam Chairman, I remember back in 1993 when I was elected, a few days after the election coming to the Assembly and looking around and finding that there were no computers. There were no wires. There was no wiring. There was no net, and I was wondering, after working with computers for so long, how we could get along without them. But we've made an awful lot of progress over the last number of years.

I notice that initiatives under the bureau's goal 2 focus extensively on technology. So I'd like to ask the Premier: how specifically has the Public Affairs Bureau used new technology such as the Internet to communicate with Albertans?

5:10

MR. KLEIN: Well, Madam Chairman, I do appreciate the question because it actually pertains to my estimates.

Like all segments of society the government certainly recognizes the growing importance Albertans place on using new technology such as the Internet. We also recognize that the importance of technology and innovation will continue to grow, not just here in Alberta but throughout the world. Indeed, that's why we put I believe it was \$30 million — that's over and above the \$500 million endowment — into ICT research through our universities. The global economy we now face is one that will be increasingly dominated by knowledge, technology, and innovation-based industries, and that incidentally is why this government continues to encourage and promote innovation here in Alberta.

I think we're already making great progress in this area, including the recent initiative I announced earlier, the \$500 million endowment to create the Alberta heritage foundation for science and engineering, plus the \$30 million we put in exclusively for ICT research. We're doing everything we can to make sure that current and future generations of Albertans are ready for the challenges and opportunities of the new global economy, and Albertans are certainly proving an interest in taking up those challenges.

As a matter of fact, there was a story on one of the television stations — I believe it was last night — and really, this is one of the very interesting challenges we have to face, and that is the capital requirements at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology for ICT. There were people virtually lining up, as I understand it, since 3 o'clock the previous morning to register for courses in computer technology. That's an indication of the demand, but what's more encouraging is that officials from NAIT indicate that the take-up on graduates from ICT courses is about 94 percent. That is quite phenomenal. These are people who will have jobs perhaps even before they graduate.

So there's no doubt that Albertans are taking an interest, and as I'm sure hon. members are aware, our province already holds the distinction of being one of the most plugged-in provinces in the country. We have embraced new technologies like the Internet and now turn to them more and more for information and discussion. Our efforts to meet the demand for Internet-based communications continue to keep pace with Albertans' needs and interests.

For example, the Alberta Connects program has given Albertans more opportunities to ask questions or provide comments on a wide variety of topics, programs, and services through government of Alberta web sites. Albertans can also provide their comments through a web page as well as an e-mail address. A computer program routes each message to the appropriate ministry, and ministries work hard to reply to all comments within 72 hours. That's quite phenomenal. You know, it used to be about a 60- to 90-day turnaround for correspondence. Now we have the ability to make that turnaround, notwithstanding the literally thousands and thousands of pieces of correspondence we get, in 72 hours.

As I mentioned earlier, the Alberta Children's Forum is another area where communications technologies and the Internet were used extensively in our communication with Albertans. A web site was created to allow Albertans to participate in a virtual forum, essentially an on-line discussion group. This is not new. This is evolving technology. This is the way of the future. We now have head offices saying: we don't need to be in a single office; we can be anywhere in Canada, anywhere in North America, anywhere in the world and have a virtual head office.

Going back to the Children's Forum, this gave people who couldn't attend the forum in Edmonton a chance to participate in the discussion. Albertans also had the opportunity to register for the forum through the web site as well as submit comments or questions.

The Public Affairs Bureau also maintains the Alberta government web site and ensures that the most important government news is available on the home page as soon as it is released. The main Alberta government home page is merely the tip of the iceberg for Internet communications going across government. From the home page Albertans can access sites for every ministry, where they can find information, ask questions, or provide feedback about the programs and services that matter most to them. Madam Chairman, the one thing, as I pointed out earlier, that Albertans have told us they want their government to do is to keep in touch with them.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure to rise this afternoon. I've been waiting anxiously to discuss in detail the budget of Executive Council. I believe in regards to the hour and the importance that Albertans are placing on the Public Affairs Bureau — you know, in the world of Edmonton-Gold Bar the truth squads always bring up people's dander, the hair on the back of the neck. Whenever we think of the words Public Affairs Bureau, we almost think of a controlled message. The hon. Premier earlier said: "bamboozle the people." It's almost like the whole idea of the Public Affairs Bureau is to control the message: this is what we want you to hear.

The Public Affairs Bureau supports the government in its ongoing dialogue with Albertans by providing communication and consulting services to all government ministries. Now, with this whole mail-out that's going on, I'm sure someone on the other side is going to be very busy over the weekend licking stamps, because we're going to send Bill 11 to every household in the province. There's definitely going to be overtime involved.

Will the Premier explain why the budget for the Public Affairs Bureau is increasing by \$1.1 million, or almost 13 percent? That's from one year to the next. That's a significant increase, and if he could explain that in due time. If we run out of time today and he will do that by letter, well, that's fine.

Could the Premier also explain for the benefit of all Albertans, not just members of Executive Council or members of government but all Albertans, including opposition members, CUPE, everyone else that he mentioned before – vested interest groups I think were the words he used. What is the breakdown of the \$8.8 million budget for the Public Affairs Bureau? How much is in salary and wages, travel expenses, advertising – now that's a big one – telephone and communications, data processing services, hosting – hosting: who would have thought? – and contracts to outside vendors. I would understand from that that there's perhaps going to be a bit of privatization here.

5:20

Alberta Corporate Service Centre. What do we have here? Eleven full-time equivalents or employees in that department? I have a number of questions for the Premier. The computer program that's going to be utilized: is that the PeopleSoft program? I would be very keen to find that out. Also, exactly what duties are these 11 individuals going to have? I know there are a lot of people, not only in the city but across the province, very concerned about this concept of shared corporate services. There are a lot of people who are presently employed by the government who would be anxious to know whether they're going to have a job or not and whether these 11 individuals are going to be detailing the layoffs as they come, if there are any layoffs.

I certainly hope there are going to be no layoffs in Alberta's public service. We need to stabilize the public service just like we need to stabilize the health care system, and the way to do that is by having stable labour relations.

Now Madam Chairman, will the Premier also provide a breakdown of the gross operating expenses of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram for 2001-2002 and 2002-2003? Also, for the Premier: what is the breakdown of the 128 full-time equivalents of the Public Affairs Bureau by subprogram: administrative services, communications services, communications technologies, Queen's Printer bookstores, publishing services, and of course the RITE telephone system?

Now, I can only assume that communications services is where all the letters are crafted and drafted, and I note that the letters coming from the Premier's office to the constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar – even though the questions asked by letter to the Premier's office are different, the responses that my constituents are receiving back from the Premier's office are all the same. One of the responses – and I've noted this – is: while I'm Premier, we'll have no two-tiered health care system in this province. But what worries me is that the Premier is someday going to retire or maybe he's going to be voted out of office – you never know – and what is going to come after? This is what perplexes not only me, but actually it was brought to my attention, Madam Chairman, by constituents.

I also have another question for the Premier: what are the projected number of full-time equivalents or employees in the Public Affairs Bureau next year and the following year?

Also for the Premier: what steps will be taken by the Public Affairs Bureau during the three-year planning period to respond better to Albertans' requests for information about health care, education, infrastructure, and the fiscal direction the province is going to go in?

Will the Premier elaborate for all hon. members of the House on the goal of the Public Affairs Bureau to expand the use of "Internet technology to open two-way dialogues with Albertans, including moderated on-line discussion groups"? Perhaps there's an opening here for the truth squad. They could practise a little bit before they go out and meet members of the public. I understand that some of them now are reluctant. It's going to be what is described as a controlled event.

Now, for the hon. Premier as well: what steps will the Public Affairs Bureau be taking over the next three years to "further develop the navigation and design elements of the Alberta Government Internet Home Page to give Albertans improved information access and feedback options"? If in due time the hon. Premier could answer that question, I will be most anxious to receive the response.

Will the Premier elaborate on the goal of the Public Affairs Bureau to "look for opportunities to deliver communications support through 'clustered' services or shared resources among ministries"?

What types of in-house training programs is the hon. Premier's government planning, Madam Chairman, for employees of the Public Affairs Bureau over the next three years? Are these training programs going to be expanded for this truth squad or any further truth squad that is going to be implemented to facilitate the government's communications message?

Will the Premier elaborate on the plan of the Public Affairs Bureau to create "a human resource intranet for Bureau staff"?

Now, Madam Chairman, I realize that in light of the hour the Premier is not going to have a chance to respond. I would be anxious to receive a letter, one of the 18,000 I believe he said that he signs every year. I'm going to get one too.

In light of the hour, Madam Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report progress.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions of Executive Council for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2001, reports progress thereon, and requests leave to sit again.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[At 5:27 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

