

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 3, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/03

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, grant us a daily awareness of the precious gift of life which You have given us. As Members of this Legislative Assembly we dedicate our lives anew to the service of our province and our country. Amen.

Please be seated.

Before recognizing the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations, hon. members, I just draw your attention to the Order Paper, the second page. There's a typing error. There are two question marks associated at one point on that page that should not be there.

head: Introduction of Visitors

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Her Excellency Daniele Smadja, ambassador and head of the delegation of the European Commission to Canada. Accompanying her is Mr. Peter van den Heuvel, first counselor for the European Commission.

Mr. Speaker, exports from Alberta to Europe total more than \$1 billion each year. With Europe playing such an important and critical role in global trade negotiations, it's very important that we have a strong working relationship with the European Union. This visit of her excellency is an excellent opportunity for us to explore ways to build on our relationship and to discuss areas where we can work together.

This is the ambassador's first official visit to Alberta, and we're pleased to welcome her to this province. I would ask that our honoured guests rise and that the members of this Assembly give them the very traditional warm welcome.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I again have a petition signed by 216 people from Spruce Grove, St. Albert, Wetaskiwin, Vegreville, Onoway, Seba Beach, Leduc, Westlock, Ardrossan, Stony Plain, and Edmonton. Once again, they are hopeful as they "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-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present another petition on osteoporosis signed by 59 individuals from Brooks, Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Edmonton, Beaumont, Sherwood Park, and Tilley. They're asking the government to support mature women's health and add preventative medications and therapies to Alberta's drug list.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to present to the Assembly a petition from over 60 Calgarians. This petition reads,

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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.

It is signed by 225 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Stony Plain, Whitecourt, Vegreville, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Fort Saskatchewan, and Edmonton.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to be able to present to the Assembly this afternoon a petition signed by 64 Calgarians who "urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

Thank you very much.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition signed by 4,566 Albertans petitioning 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." This submission brings the total number of signatures on this petition to well over 21,000 today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: A little patience today, hon. members. We have quite a list.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented yesterday opposing private health care 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-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd request that the petition I presented on May 2 in the Assembly urging the government to stop promoting private health care now be 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 Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I presented regarding the undermining of public health care and the concerns about it be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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-Glengarry.

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask that the petition I presented signed by 219 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped be now 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 Edmonton-Ellerslie.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented earlier this week now be 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.

MS OLSEN: I, too, request that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 82 Albertans requesting that the promotion of private health care and the undermining of public health care be stopped 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 healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition I presented to the Assembly on May 2 regarding public health care be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

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 Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point I'd ask if the petition I presented on May 2, 2000, registering opposition to private health care might now be read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

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. Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the government's promotion of private health care, which of course brought the total on the petition so far to 70,000, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I also request that the petition I tabled yesterday regarding the promotion of private health care 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-Rutherford.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday from a number of citizens opposing privatization of health care now be read and received.

THE CLERK:

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. leader of the third party.

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

1:40

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.

We, the undersigned, ask the assembly to petition the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request that the petition which I tabled in this Legislative Assembly yesterday regarding the government's plan to privatize health care in Alberta now be 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.

head: Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman I would like to table five copies of the report of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices recommending the reappointment of Mr. Peter Valentine as the Auditor for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to give oral notice of the following motion:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly concur in the recommendation of the Select Standing Committee on Legislative Offices agreed to on April 19, 2000, to recommend to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor that Mr. Peter Valentine be reappointed as Auditor General for the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party on a Standing Order 40 submission.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 40 I'll be asking for the unanimous consent of the Legislative Assembly to debate the following matter of urgent and pressing necessity:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly has no confidence in the government's handling of the escalating labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of the responses to written questions 11, 12, and 13 as ordered by the House.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to table a survey that I have conducted of 385 residents, 85 of which have responded, and these responses are contained in the appropriate number of copies, which I table today.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table two letters, one from Red Deer and one from Edmonton, strongly opposing Bill 11.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from Merv and Hildegard Prediger from Edmonton-Gold Bar, and they're outlining their opposition to Bill 11.

The second is e-mail I have received from Ken McGoogan. He is a striking *Calgary Herald* journalist, and he would like to "urge the government to use all its legislative powers" to get a settlement in the *Calgary Herald* strike.

Thank you.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of the schedule of approved hospitals from Deputy Minister's Order 4/97.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a one-page report. The report is titled Anonymous Cash, and it confirms that "\$375.66 in cash was received from the Provincial Treasurer's Office and deposited to the General Revenue Fund." This is not anonymous cash. This was \$375.66 which was collected from Albertans who were assembled at the Legislature specifically to pay for damages caused to the property or the Chamber with the Bill 11 demonstrations.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, all letters of opposition to Bill 11. I'll simply read the names into the record: Duane Dawson, Marne St. Claire, Merv and Jean Rogers, and lastly, Stephen Lamoureux.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly students and their family members who are of the community of St. Gabriel's cyberschool in St. Albert. These students hail from the community of Onoway, represented here in the Assembly by the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne; from Lethbridge county, by the Member for Little Bow; from Swan Hills, by our Member for Barrhead-Westlock, yourself, Mr. Speaker; and from Edmonton, by the Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them all to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 11 special guests from the newest school in Little Bow, Providence Christian school, opened last month in Monarch. Today with the nine students who are here on a three-day extended learning experience are their teacher, Mr. Chris Heikoop, and their bus driver, Sjaane Heikoop. Would they please rise in the members' gallery and receive the warm recognition of the Assembly.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two teachers, seven parent helpers, and 46 bright students from St. Hilda Catholic elementary school in Mill Woods. The teachers are Ms Annette Mendiuk and Mrs. Markiana Hryschuk with parent helpers Mrs. Fedun, Mrs. Kovacic, Mrs. Camina, Mrs. Rosales, Mrs. Kurtz, Mrs. Prangle, and Mrs. Villatoro. The class and the teachers and helpers are in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my enthusiasm to introduce the students and families from St. Gabriel's cyberschool, I forgot to introduce the two teachers accompanying them. They are

Miss Kara Zutz and Mr. Bernie Hryciw, and I would ask them to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Voting on Bill 11

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thousands of Albertans have gathered peacefully at the doors of this Legislature to call for the protection of public health care in Alberta and for a free vote on the government's private health care policy. This question is to the Premier. How many Albertans have to come to the Legislature demanding a free vote on the government's private health care policy before the Premier listens?

MR. KLEIN: Well, yesterday, Mr. Speaker, as the leader of the Liberal opposition well knows, we had a number of votes on amendments and on the preamble and the title of Bill 11, and there was a free vote.

Mr. Speaker, just to set the record straight, the whole issue of a so-called free vote was discussed in caucus in my absence – in my absence – so that I wouldn't be there to fetter the discretion of members of this great caucus. As I understand it, the vote was unanimous to accept the government's position. That's a free vote.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, what was the Premier so afraid of that he couldn't even attend his own caucus meeting on a discussion of a free vote?

AN HON. MEMBER: He's not a dictator.

MR. KLEIN: Quite true. Unlike the leader of the Liberal opposition, I am not a dictator. I don't stamp my foot and say: this is the way it's going to be. I stayed away from that meeting quite specifically, as I mentioned, so as not to fetter the discretion and the good thinking of this great caucus of ours.

1:50

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, can the Premier confirm that not all members were recorded in the votes taken last night because of a split in his caucus over the free vote?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I recall it, last night on all the points of the bill the vote was quite consistent, 45 to 14 or 44 to 14. All of the members in the House representing the government caucus voted in favour of the amendments, save for the subamendment, which was voted no by all the members of this caucus.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 10, 1994, quite a long time ago, the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West stated:

I was impressed with the concept of free vote. I incorporated the free vote into my campaign to win the nomination, and I believe it helped me actually win that nomination.

My questions are to the Premier. Given that the government has now invoked closure on its major health policy, will the Premier at least make a commitment to allow his MLAs, including the MLA for Lethbridge-West, a free vote?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can't speak for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, who is not in the House unfortunately today, but I'm sure that if he were asked, his reply would be: I voted to vote with the government, and I voted to vote for a policy to protect public health in this province.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the Member for Lethbridge-West was nominated on a principle of free votes, why won't the Premier take a stand for that member and allow him to do it again?

MR. KLEIN: I'll go a step further, and with your concurrence, Mr. Speaker, I will ask all members of my caucus here today to register, either vocally or by standing or doing whatever they want: do you feel that you have a free vote?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Yes. Yeah.

MR. KLEIN: Right. There. [applause] Okay.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, have we got an opportunity for this government. Today I have signed a pledge that says that the members of the Alberta Official Opposition caucus "will be able to reflect the wishes of their constituents through a free vote" in the Legislature "at Third Reading of Bill 11." I've signed mine, and we've got one here for the Premier. Will the Premier sign his?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, that is a caucus decision, and if this caucus decides that they want to have a free vote in third reading, then fine. I'm not about to prevent that.

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition knows how a Conservative caucus works. Well, it works quite a bit differently now than when she was on Priorities and in Treasury. Basically, we have a very open and a very free caucus. If the caucus members vote to have a free vote, so to speak, then that indeed will be done, but if this caucus votes unanimously to support the government's position and the government's policy and the government's bill as introduced by the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness, that decision then will prevail. That's democracy.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this Premier is allowing free votes, then why was he forced to use closure to get this bill through committee?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we voted to invoke closure to get on with the bill. We voted to invoke closure so that we could ban extra billing. We voted to invoke closure so that we could ban queue-jumping. We voted to invoke closure so that we could ban private hospitals. We voted to invoke closure so that we could limit contracts to minor surgery only. We voted to invoke closure so that we could require contracts to be made public. We voted to invoke closure so that we could leave medical decisions to the physicians. We voted to invoke closure to ensure the efficient use of existing capacity in public hospitals before contracts are let. We voted to invoke closure to strengthen conflict of interest provisions. We voted to invoke closure to remove the profit motive from the sale of enhanced services. And guess what? They voted against all of those motions.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, after that cute little display that the Premier and the caucus had, will this Premier sign the pledge which says that he's going to allow a free vote, and will he explain it to the people of Alberta if he won't?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't need to sign a pledge. My pledge is my oath to this Legislature and to Executive Council. That is my pledge.

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

MRS. MacBETH: You're losing it. [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, now, there was a recognition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you. I'm sorry; I just lost my count there. Mr. Speaker, if this Premier is so committed to his pledge of leadership in this province, will he commit here and now not to invoke closure on third reading?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker. Well, yes, maybe I will. I will if the Liberals will stand up and commit right now that they will not filibuster. [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Questions on Matters Previously Decided

THE SPEAKER: Please. Please, hon. members. I would like to remind hon. members that matters that have been decided by the House are not . . . [interjections]

Hon. members, while it appears that some members seem to be having fun this afternoon, I would like to advise hon. members what the rules are. Matters that have been decided in this Assembly are not the subject matter of question period. It was a committee of the Assembly of this House that voted to invoke a certain procedure on a division.

2:00

I would like to draw the attention of all hon. members to Standing Orders. These are not *Beauchesne* or *Erskine May*. These are orders of this Assembly, written by the members of this Assembly, agreed to by the members of this Assembly. Standing Order 23 says that a member will be called to order if that member

(c) persists in needless repetition or raises matters which have been decided during the current session . . .

(f) debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that member's intention to move that it be rescinded.

There's no such movement, and it wouldn't be the case during question period to move it anyway.

Now, these are rules written by the members of this House. These are not rules that have been taken out of books.

The leader of the third party.

Private Health Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government may have scored a hollow victory last night. However, the government has lost on every other front. Hundreds of thousands of Albertans have been energized and politicized. Every single opinion poll shows strong and rock-solid opposition to what's being rammed down the throats of Albertans by a government that refuses to listen. My questions are to the Premier. While the government ignored the hundreds of thousands of Albertans who wrote letters, made phone calls, sent e-mails and faxes, and signed petitions, what made the government decide to subsidize a few private health care special interests who can't seem to turn a profit on their own?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to the hon. member's statement that there's rock-solid opposition. That is not true. My office and all members of this caucus have received literally

thousands and thousands of letters in support of the policy and of the bill. The only difference is that we don't waste the time of this Legislature tabling all of the letters. I indicated once before that if they wanted to get into that game, we could start tabling the letters we've received in support.

This is a very strange relationship indeed that has come together between the Liberals and the NDs. I can understand the NDs and their relationship with the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Alberta Federation of Labour and the United Nurses of Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association, but now to marry the NDs with the Liberals makes for a strange but maybe a compatible political relationship, Mr. Speaker. To see the leader of the third party vote, as the Liberals voted, against the principles that the NDs fundamentally uphold was indeed something to behold, and that will live in *Hansard* forever, that the NDs voted with the Liberals to promote extra billing, to promote queue-jumping, to promote . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I hope all members will avoid continuing the debate in the question period.

The hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to speak on behalf of Albertans regardless of what the Premier thinks.

THE SPEAKER: I'm sorry. Hon. leader of the third party, it's not the Premier you have to deal with. It's the chairman you have to deal with.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. So I'm going to ask very humbly again: get on with the question.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier confirm that to avoid public outrage and possible electoral defeat, the government plans to put any approvals of private surgical facilities with overnight stays on ice until after the next provincial election?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the policy, of course, that is now the subject of Bill 11 doesn't leave that decision up to us. It simply says that RHAs, under very strict circumstances, may – may, not will. If a surgical clinic meets all the requirements of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, meets all the requirements of the rules of medicare, meets all the requirements of the rules of the Canada Health Act, may, then with the concurrence of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, with the concurrence of the minister a regional health authority under very, very strict circumstances may contract to a surgical clinic that might require a patient to stay overnight. That's what it's all about.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Why did the government and its handpicked CRHA administrators close three public hospitals in Calgary, blow one of them up and sell two others to private special interests for cents on the dollar, if not to create the conditions for the establishment of private, for-profit hospitals?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's a very interesting question. The closure of the Bow Valley centre and the Holy Cross hospital was done after numerous reports were prepared vis-a-vis the costs, first of all, the \$182 million dollar cost of totally refitting the General hospital.

MR. DICKSON: You didn't have to do it all. Two buildings could have been kept.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you know, now he's gone from lawyer to pretend politician to town planner. He has no idea. There were numerous reports saying that those hospitals had to be closed so we could reopen hundreds of state-of-the-art beds in hospitals like the Lougheed, the Rockyview, the Foothills. This notion that the Grace hospital was closed is absolutely wrong. It was moved to a state-of-the-art centre for women's health in Calgary. It is indeed the pride of this country as it pertains to women's health.

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

Children at Risk

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I read with interest the Start Young, Start Now report of the task force on children in crisis. On page 26 reference is made to:

Strong linkages are required among social workers, schools, probation and parole officers, police, and community agencies. Information should be shared among communities, agencies and schools, and additional steps should be taken to expand successful strategies across the province.

My question is to the hon. Minister of Children's Services. Would you please tell us what immediate steps you are taking to implement the expansion of these strategies, which are so desperately needed to protect our children and youth from abuse, violence, bullying, and gang activities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a very good question. There are two particular areas that I would cite. Number one, two years ago in the business plan of this government the Alberta children's initiative drew all of the departments together and requested and required in the business plan collaborative action that would see strategies at the local level built for incentives to join together in the circle around uniting the child and the family.

The second strategy, Mr. Speaker, was the implementation of the child and family services authorities. Through that and our partnership with education and the local police forces, a student health initiative is one example of things that we believe should be expanded to include other agencies to support the child in need.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Who will take the lead and be responsible for the implementation of these strategies: the school boards, the Justice department, social services, or your department?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the co-ordination role of the Children's Services department is simply that. We are advocates, and we deliver services for children, very special children with needs, but in each of those particular areas from time to time every ministry would have its role in leadership. If it was deemed to be predominantly a justice issue, for example, the Minister of Justice would deliver the program, contain the funding within their budget, and would have the partnership and the agreement of the other partners.

2:10

So it would be at times different leaders for different service delivery. Predominantly, the child and family services authorities deliver to the child already identified at risk and investigate it. Also,

Mr. Speaker, the delivery of family and community support services at the local level does cross over some and all of those boundaries for local delivery.

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

MS PAUL: Thank you. My second supplementary, also to the same minister. Would you be supportive and help to take the necessary steps to implement a course starting at the elementary level as part of the curriculum in all Alberta schools to deal with violent issues?

MS EVANS: Along with my colleague the Minister of Justice, who may wish to supplement this answer, I believe that there is a lot of interest in doing whatever we can to mitigate against family violence and abuse issues. That is but one step that would follow what is already in place, Mr. Speaker, and that is removal of the perpetrator of violence in the home so that in fact the family does not have to relocate while the perpetrator is held elsewhere.

If the Minister of Justice would wish to supplement, certainly we are open to strategies and development of those strategies that can support the child.

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

Grain Transportation

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week's announcement by the Canadian Transport Agency increasing freight rates for Alberta farmers by 4 and a half percent could prove catastrophic. In my constituency this will boost freight rates to approximately \$29.25 per tonne and higher in many areas of the province. Only Ottawa can pre-empt the solution by further penalizing farmers. Several months ago we were led to believe a solution was pending at the federal cabinet level on the Estey/Kroeger reports. My questions today are to the minister of agriculture. Can the minister tell me, as a result of his discussions with the federal ministers and their officials, when Alberta's farmers can expect action on grain transportation reform?

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

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been a very long process. As a matter of fact, well over a year and a half ago the federal government appointed Justice Estey to look at the whole issue of transportation and the movement of grain from the prairies. He reported about a year ago, and immediately the federal government set up a committee under Arthur Kroeger to look at the implementation of the recommendations.

Our Premier has written to the Prime Minister urging the implementation. I went to Ottawa and met with eight cabinet ministers, the Prime Minister's office, the Privy Council, members from Treasury and thought that we had a fairly good understanding about what needed to be done and was very hopeful that we would soon see some changes.

Unfortunately, those changes have not occurred, and of course now we've been hit with another catastrophic expenditure that is totally unnecessary. If in fact the things that we recommended were implemented, we would look at keeping another \$200 million to \$300 million in the pockets of prairie farmers, and those are farmers' dollars, not tax dollars.

We're very hopeful that we will soon hear – and hopefully it'll be

before the new crop year so that these new announced rates won't be implemented – but, Mr. Speaker, it's impossible to predict. We're dealing with Liberals, and as we saw last night, they're totally unpredictable. When the Leader of the Opposition votes against the Canada Health Act, then we . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Questions outside Government Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, my great fear was that I would have to interject on the question. Recognizing that the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development is not a member of the federal Privy Council and as the question asked for when a decision might come from the federal cabinet, it certainly would not sit within the competence of a minister of the government of Alberta. As we listened, my worst fears were confirmed.

Now, hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod, do you have a specific question that might actually be within the administrative competence of a minister of the government of Alberta?

Grain Transportation (continued)

MR. COUTTS: Is Alberta's policy and position on grain transportation the same as that of the Canadian Wheat Board's chairman, Ken Ritter, who blames the railway solely for increasing freight costs?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if you ever saw a case where the frying pan is calling the kettle black, this has got to be the situation. When you see the chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board blaming the railways for the high cost of moving grain in this country, it's something to behold. The fact is that the railways, of course, made an application to the federal agency to have this increase in freight rates, but if in fact the policies that we have been putting forward were implemented, then this freight rate increase would not go ahead.

MR. COUTTS: My last question to the minister of agriculture: what is Alberta's minimum package of changes out of the Kroeger/Estey process that must be agreed to?

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

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We believe that the Canadian Wheat Board should be moved to the spout, and that's where they would take possession of the grain. We know that they can do a reasonably good job of selling, and that's where they should take possession. We believe that in order to get the grain to the port, there should be contracts and that the Canadian Wheat Board would call those contracts through a third party. We need to have a third party that would administer the contracts. The contract would go to grain companies on the prairies. They would then fulfill the contract by moving the grain out.

The thing that is important in this whole scenario is that the grain would be then pulled to the port as opposed to pushed. What's happening today is that the Wheat Board is pushing grain to the port, filling up the storage there, and we can't move other products through. So that has to change.

We also have to make sure that the Canadian Wheat Board doesn't have control of the rolling stock. Today they have total control of 70

percent of the stock, and as long as that's in place, we cannot get the rolling stock or the storage at the port.

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

Closure on Bill 11

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year it took the hon. minister of agriculture about 36 hours to fly to Shanghai and back and the Minister of Economic Development 36 hours in traveling time to go to Beijing and back. Including last night's closure motion, only 38 hours have been spent discussing the future of public health care in Alberta. To the Premier: why is this government limiting the time of the Assembly debate on the future of health care in this province to an amount of time less than the 72 hours it took two cabinet ministers to fly to Communist China and back?

Speaker's Ruling Questions on Matters Previously Decided

THE SPEAKER: Before I recognize the hon. leader of the government, can I just refer again to what I referred to earlier in the question period about Standing Orders 23(c) and 23(f). Perhaps I misunderstand something, but there's an answer. Fine.

Hon. member, proceed with your second question.

Closure on Bill 11 (continued)

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, given that this government is ignoring Albertans' wishes, just whose time line is the Premier on? This is a major policy change. Why is it being rammed through with such haste?

MR. KLEIN: I beg to differ. This is not a major policy change. Mr. Speaker, it is not a major policy change to endorse the fundamental principles of the Canada Health Act. This government caucus last night endorsed the principles of the Canada Health Act. They voted against the principles of the Canada Health Act, and the NDs did as well.

2:20

That is not a major shift in policy. Mr. Speaker, surgical clinics have been operating in this province for many years. Thirty of them were under the watch of the then minister of health, now the leader of the Liberal opposition. Thirty of them not only were allowed to operate but were allowed to charge facility fees. All this policy does is put fences around the operation and the contracting out of surgical facilities by regional health authorities. This is not a major shift in policy.

As a matter of fact, some editorialists and some respected columnists have referred to this as a very benign and a very timid piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. SOETAERT: That's why you spent \$3 million marketing it.

MR. KLEIN: Well, we had to spend some money to market this, Mr. Speaker, to offset the propaganda and the vicious misinformation being put out by the Liberals, the NDs, CUPE, UNA, the Friends of Medicare backed by the Alberta Federation of Labour.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Liberals have agreed not to filibuster, will the Premier commit to not invoking closure on private health care at third reading?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I can give the hon. member an honest answer today. The answer is the same as the answer I gave during committee debate on this, and the answer was that if the Liberals don't filibuster, we won't use closure. We don't want to use closure.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, at third reading there could be a reasoned amendment introduced that could be debated by every member of this Legislative Assembly – I understand the rules are up to 20 minutes – and then we're back to the main motion. Every member of this Assembly again can speak to the main motion. That will add to the total debate. Well, do 40 times 84. You know, 40 times 84, that's a lot of speaking; I'll tell you that for sure. That's a lot of talking. Add to that the almost 55 hours now that we have spent on this bill, and that to me represents a lot of talking in this Legislature, more talking than ever before, than ever in the history of this Legislature on a single piece of legislation.

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

Historic Sites

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Historical Preservation and Re-building Society in Calgary continues to provide leadership on issues regarding the value and significance of our historic sites. Recently they had expressed concerns about the future of three historic schools . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the chair has recognized the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, and she has every right to be heard in this Assembly. She has every right to be heard uninterrupted in this Assembly. She is a member of this Assembly who has every right to ask a question, and she has been recognized to ask a question. I'm going to ask for your indulgence to be polite enough to allow her to be heard, and I'll invite her to start over again.

Historic Sites (continued)

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Historical Preservation and Re-building Society in Calgary continues to provide leadership on issues regarding the value and significance of historic sites. Recently they have expressed concerns about the future of three historic schools that the Calgary board of education has listed as surplus: Dr. Carl Safran, Victoria, and Bridgeland schools. They have asked the province in conjunction with the city to consider designating these buildings prior to any change in their status with the CBE. My question is to the Minister of Community Development, responsible for historic sites. What opportunities are available to ensure the preservation of these buildings?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, on December 21, 1999, the mayor of Calgary did in fact request through the Alberta Historical Resources Act that the Department of Community Development look at the viability of these three schools, whether or not they merit designation. Currently that evaluation is going on and, I might add, a decision has not been made. However, before the Calgary board of education can dispose of these properties, they have to go through the Department of Infrastructure, and I've apprized the Minister of Infrastructure of the proceedings on this particular issue.

MRS. BURGNER: Could the same minister please answer: what is the status of the old St. Mary's girls school with respect to the notice of intention to designate?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In March of this year the department issued a notice of intent to designate St. Mary's school as an historic site under the Historical Resources Act. The separate school board, which is the owner of the school in Calgary, has requested a hearing before the board to determine if in fact it's viable. That hearing will be held on June 1, and the decision by the minister whether or not to designate will be made after that hearing.

MRS. BURGNER: Finally, will the minister be further involved with the preservation of the Loughheed Building in Calgary?

MR. WOLOSCHYN: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Loughheed Building, as far as this minister is concerned, a decision has been made not to designate it. However, I might add that the city of Calgary has every opportunity to designate this building if they feel it is significant for the people of Calgary.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood, followed by the hon. Member for Redwater.

Health Care Facilities

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under section 44(2) of the Hospitals Act this government has been given the authority to "determine which hospitals offer a standard of service that qualifies them as approved hospitals." Given this authority, a list has been prepared under Deputy Minister's Order 4/97 of approved hospitals in this province. I tabled that earlier today. My questions are to the Premier. What criteria is used to determine what is and what is not an approved hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the question is more appropriately put to the Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, this is the second or third time this particular question has been asked. It has certainly been answered before. I would like to point out that in a recent court judgment the legislation and its application were upheld in terms of at least this stage of court proceedings.

The Department of Health and Wellness determines what an approved hospital is in terms of a range of services being available which is appropriate to the particular region of the province which is to be served, Mr. Speaker. They approve it on the basis of there being the appropriate staffing with the appropriate qualifications. They approve it today in terms of being part of a regional health authority's system subject to being included in the business plan, which is subject to ministerial approval. Those are a number of the criteria that are considered when we designate facilities.

MS OLSEN: Can the minister then explain how it is that two hospitals, the Eckville municipal hospital and the Elnora general hospital closed in 1995, and another one, the Calgary general hospital, Bow Valley centre, which was blown up, made it onto the government's approved hospital list? Do empty buildings and piles of rubble qualify for approved hospitals, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, those particular facilities met all the requirements when they were in operation many years ago.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the inability of this government to properly monitor the status of approved hospitals in this province, how can Albertans trust this government to effectively regulate the private health care scheme and private health care facilities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Children's Services

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Recent media reports have talked about a new plan which would put responsibility for some child welfare cases in the Edmonton area into the hands of community agencies. Can the minister tell us about this plan and why it is being proposed?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister for Children's Services.

2:30

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Each of the 18 child and family services authorities have been requested to develop service plans that reflect local priorities. In the context of Ma'Môwe Capital region service planning about a third of the staff are staff of the authority, and about two-thirds belong to community agencies like McMan, Catholic Social Services, et cetera.

What has been evolving is a service plan that will see low risk or consultations and counseling and support services for children and families in the home dealt with primarily by contract agencies and the higher risk cases that require intensive child welfare protection officers being dealt with more frequently by social workers that are employed by the CFSA. So those are some of the elements of the planning.

MR. BRODA: My first supplemental is also to the Minister of Children's Services. What impact will this proposed service delivery framework have on child welfare workers?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, there has been extensive consultation with the social workers. One of the things they've identified is that frequently the administrative work and the tasks they're asked to do impede their ability to act in their professional capacity in social welfare. In this service plan we look at enhancing their opportunity to give their full professional attention to the child and to the family and removing some of the administrative duties.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, with the caseload review and the work that's being done by our department in reviewing the very specific impacts to social welfare workers in the delivery of the system, we hope to identify even greater efficiencies and, in consultation with the workers, continue to work on behalf of all the best interests of the parties involved.

MR. BRODA: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: what is the time line for this framework, and when will it be implemented?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday at a meeting held in my constituency the CEO volunteered to the workers that attended that this consultation would be open ended until they addressed all the concerns. So although there is a desire to get with the process, certainly and clearly there's a desire to be co-operative with the workers involved. What we see is a framework of working through the concerns and satisfying mutually all of the parties that there is work that will address their issues.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I have indicated and will be meeting with members of the association and the workers themselves and talking further about some of their concerns in this process as we consult on their issues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

Private Health Services (continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 1999 annual report of the Calgary regional health authority points out that two pilot studies were conducted on the contracting out of surgical procedures to private providers. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Does the minister know the results of those two pilot studies?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I understand the pilots or the initial projects that were undertaken, they were undertaken with respect to surgical clinics dealing with eye surgery. The valuation was done in terms of performance. They isolated the amount of money that had been previously spent on this particular number of procedures before when it was outside of the system. In fact, we were getting penalized under the Canada Health Act for allowing that to occur.

They isolated that amount of money. They compared it to the money they were spending per case within the contract arrangements and compared it also to the cost that they had incurred in other parts of their system providing these services. They found that they were providing more procedures for the same amount of money as they had been spending before in this particular area.

DR. MASSEY: To the same minister: given, Mr. Minister, that these are the only local studies on the cost-effectiveness of private surgical clinics, what efforts has the minister made to make public those conclusions, given the debate on health care?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would estimate that this is at least the third time the opposition has asked the same question, and I've given the same answer.

DR. MASSEY: To the same minister: will you table those reports?

MR. JONSON: I can provide to them the results that were reported to me, Mr. Speaker.

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

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of my constituents have raised with me concerns about the growing waiting time for MRI services both in Medicine Hat and across the province. Several weeks ago the Minister of Health and Wellness announced a plan to purchase four new publicly funded MRI machines for Alberta, namely two in Calgary and two in Edmonton. My questions today are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. While these new MRIs will no doubt dramatically reduce waiting times for people living in Calgary and Edmonton, what action is being taken by the minister to increase access to MRI services in the rest of the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as I recall, it was approximately a year

and a half ago that we established an expert committee dealing with the whole area of diagnostic imaging. We looked to them to compile an assessment of our capacity in the province and make recommendations as to how we should proceed to improve our overall diagnostic imaging service. One of the very important components of that committee's work was to look at the MRI situation across the province. The committee did indicate that it was feasible, advisable to look at providing MRI services in our regional hospitals.

Following receipt of that report and due consideration by Alberta Health and Wellness and in government, we authorized regional health authorities to move ahead in the Chinook region with an MRI. It is currently in place and operating. An MRI in the David Thompson area is in place, and also in the Palliser region, Medicine Hat, and Mistahia, the Grande Prairie region.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is moving forward. We want to serve the regions of the province as well as the two major centres, so I think this indicates our commitment in that area.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you. Well, given that my constituents feel that it seems a bit unfair that communities like Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, and Grande Prairie have been told to undertake public fund-raising so they can acquire MRI facilities and the health authorities are told that they must use ongoing funding from their budgets to fund the operation of the MRIs and the government has helped out Calgary and Edmonton for funding not only for capital but for operational costs, is there going to be an effort to ensure that there is some equity between the allocation of funds to the other regions in the province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to emphasize that we recognize that in our funding of MRI services we need to be fair to all the regions of the province, including those outside of Edmonton and Calgary. It is not, however, quite the case that fund-raising was not involved in the support at least of two of the MRIs that were established in Edmonton and Calgary. In fact, some rather significant funding was provided in one particular case in terms of the capital cost.

But I would like to make two points, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we do realize that we need to provide operational funding for the MRIs, both the ones in the regions and the ones in the Capital and Calgary regions. We intend to do so on a reasonable basis according to the volume they attract and the costs they incur. That will be done in subsequent business plans, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing is that we will examine the whole area of capital costs incurred, and we will look at factoring in a fair amount of money to each of the regions for the purchase of the actual MRI machines.

2:40

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is really the only one that most Albertans are concerned about. With this additional funding in place or planned for MRI facilities, will we actually see a significant impact on the waiting lists? When will we actually see the waiting lists drop, Mr. Minister?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to just make a point A and a point B here. First of all with the expansion. There has been some expansion of MRI services in the province in the Chinook region, and with the additional MRIs in the two cities it's brought them up to, I think, five publicly operated MRIs.

We have seen a marked increase in the number of MRI scans

being done in this province. If I recall correctly, there's been an increase of somewhere around 15,000 MRI scans per year to over 30,000. With these MRI machines coming onstream, we hope that by the end of this year or very early next year we will rank at the top of MRI performance in the country – and that's publicly funded MRI services – right up there with the current leader, Ontario.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, seven hon. members have advised today that they would like to participate in Recognitions, and we will begin that process in a few seconds from now, but prior to doing that, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly Miss Victoria Gubina, a very talented lawyer and Yeltsin democracy fellow from Saratov, Russia. Miss Gubina is here studying Canadian constitutional corporate and commercial law in Canada for about eight weeks as part of her Yeltsin democracy fellowship, and we're very pleased that three of those precious weeks are being spent right here in our capital city of Edmonton. [remarks in Russian]

Hello, Victoria. It is a pleasure to have you here and to welcome you to Canada and to Alberta. [as submitted]

She has risen, and I would ask all members of the House to please join me in a rousing warm welcome for our special guest.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today a ceremony took place on the steps of the Legislature to commemorate the repatriation and internment of the remains of an unknown Canadian soldier. This unknown soldier, who died in the First World War and was buried in France, represents all the brave Canadian men and women who have died both in war and in the service of peace. All provinces are participating in this event, which will be completed at a ceremony in Ottawa on May 28 of this year.

At that time the remains of an unidentified soldier, who was selected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission from a cemetery near Vimy Ridge, will be buried in a special tomb in front of the National War Memorial. This site will be known as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and will become a focal point of commemoration for all memorial events at the National War Memorial.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude and that of this Assembly to the Royal Canadian Legion, who initiated this project as a millennium tribute to all Canadians who have died or may die for their country in all conflicts in the future. Now at last Canadians will have their own fitting memorial to these men and women and their families who have sacrificed so much for Canada.

Thank you.

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

Gold Bar School

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I would like to recognize one of the finest elementary schools in Alberta. Gold Bar school will be celebrating its 40th anniversary on May 25 this spring.

The school was officially opened on October 30, 1959, by then principal Mr. Norman Lougheed. I am proud to say that the community feels a great sense of pride in the school. In fact, there are many current students whose parents once attended Gold Bar school. Today 161 students from kindergarten to grade 6 in seven classes as well as one special-needs class attend this fine school.

On the occasion of Gold Bar school's 40th anniversary I would like to recognize the current principal, Mr. Terry Terlesky, teachers, volunteers, parents, and students for their accomplishments and contributions to the Edmonton-Gold Bar community. A fine school is a reflection of a fine community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Spinal Health Week

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, May 1 to May 7, 2000, is Spinal Health Week. This annual recognition by the College of Chiropractors of Alberta brings awareness to the relationship of the spine and a person's overall health. For most adults back pain occurs at some point in their lives and is one of the leading causes of disability in Canada.

Chiropractic treatment is an effective method of health care. It often provides patients with relief from pain and improved health without invasive surgery and the use of drugs. Patient satisfaction continues to be very high, and a growing number of Albertans seek access to chiropractic treatment as a result. Last year over 380,000 Albertans consulted a chiropractor.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Members of the Legislative Assembly join me in recognizing the importance of Spinal Health Week and the contributions of our Alberta chiropractors, members of a team of Alberta health care professionals.

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

Holocaust Remembrance

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we marked the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day. This day remembers the unimaginable horrors that were inflicted upon 6 million Jews as well as millions of others who perished in the atrocities of the Second World War. Yom Hashoah ensures that their sacrifices will never be forgotten by future generations.

Alberta's Jewish communities, which include second- and third-generation children of survivors of the concentration camps, must be recognized for their efforts to educate others to ensure that these horrors against humanity will never be witnessed again.

We urge this provincial government to consider two initiatives which will provide a living remembrance of the Holocaust. The first would be the passage of legislation similar to what has occurred in seven other provinces to recognize Holocaust memorial day for the province. The second would be to place a memorial on the grounds of this Legislature. These two actions would be a living memorial to ensure that we never forget.

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

Properties Sports Association

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Properties Sports Association, which is also known as the PSA, is a highly respected athletic organization in northeast Calgary. This Saturday the association will be hosting a gala evening to celebrate its 25th anniversary. This significant event will pay tribute to and honour all the PSA directors, organizers, parent volunteers, and participants. Over the years they've given countless hours of their time and energy to the athletic and personal development of our young people.

The successes of our PSA teams have been very impressive, Mr. Speaker. Many provincial and citywide championships have been won, and numerous individual honours have been achieved. I am very proud to recognize and say thank you to the 400 volunteers who each year coach 5,000 young players in hockey, figure skating, ringette, basketball, soccer, softball, T-ball, and coach-pitch. Along with many others my own children have had their lives enriched through many enjoyable years of playing basketball with the PSA.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all members of the Assembly to join me in congratulating the Properties Sports Association in celebrating their 25th anniversary.

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

2:50

Library Week

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to recognize our public libraries and the librarians and staff members, all of whom run them with exemplary dedication and purpose. It reminds me of what Andrew Carnegie had to say about the importance of public libraries:

There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the Free Public Library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration.

It gives me great pleasure, indeed, to be able to add my own thanks to our own Legislature librarians, who are always most prompt and helpful and display the highest standards of service and expertise. Their skills and generosity are noticeable and remarkable. I speak, I hope, on behalf of everyone here and all those who use this library. This staff does a great job, and we thank them for it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I am very pleased to rise and speak about the Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary. The SAS was formed in May 1989 to serve the desperate needs of youth aged 16 to 25 who are victims of street life. For these street youth who genuinely want to make a change in their lives and who desire to become productive members of the Calgary community SAS provides this opportunity, because SAS works with these youths and their children. It established a long-term program, three to seven years, which includes housing facilities, in-classroom education, on-the-job training, and follow-up support.

SAS, since its inception, has enjoyed a 70 percent success rate. This is defined by the participants who have not returned to a street lifestyle and who are continually progressing in their journey towards wholeness. SAS believes that success is a journey and not the destination and that real success must be based on serving others. In the end every success is attached to a struggle as well as a dream or a vision.

I would like to ask the Assembly to recognize the great contribution of the Servants Anonymous Society of Calgary in making Alberta a better place.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today is the birthday of the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

head: Motions under Standing Order 40

THE SPEAKER: Now the leader of the third party on a Standing Order 40 application.

Calgary Herald Strike

Dr. Pannu:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly has no confidence in the government's handling of the escalating labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Speaking to urgency, Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening the labour troubles at the *Calgary Herald* further escalated. *Herald* management locked out 105 press operators and production workers. This latest lockout brings to three the number of labour disputes plaguing this once proud Calgary newspaper. A hundred editorial staff and 60-some employees who worked in the *Herald* distribution centre have already been on a legal strike for the last 177 days. Long and bitter labour disputes inevitably divide communities.

Speaking to it . . .

Speaker's Ruling Standing Order 40 Motions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, just a little reminder. Remember the last time we did this? Remember that the Speaker invited the hon. member to come and visit, so they had a thorough discussion about what the words "urgent and pressing" mean? You don't have to define or give your argument now. All you have to do now is make the case for a pressing necessity, and if the House agrees to it, then you can give your speech.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I certainly was trying to be very much cognizant of your advice, and I will certainly continue to do that.

Debate Continued

DR. PANNU: Speaking to urgency, Mr. Speaker. It is imperative that members have an opportunity to debate the government's handling of the disputes at the *Calgary Herald*. That is because there is no evidence that the government is actively seeking a resolution to these bitter disputes. The management of the *Calgary Herald* steadfastly refuses to engage in serious collective bargaining. Was it any surprise, then, when the *Herald's* owner publicly stated that he plans to wait two years and then just decertify the union?

In the face of this intransigence the Minister of Human Resources and Employment doesn't appear to have lifted a finger. Meanwhile, the minister refuses to meet with 30 striking employees who visited the Legislature several weeks ago. At the same time, the Premier appeared to question the right of journalists to even belong to trade unions. Allowing a debate on this motion would provide an opportunity for the minister on behalf of the government to explain what steps he is taking, if any, to bring the prolonged dispute to an end.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we appear to have a recipe consisting of intransigent management, an anti-union owner, an indifferent government, and terrible labour laws. It's imperative that members be given an opportunity to debate a motion the effect of which should be to light a fire under the government. This confidence that

members have in the government's handling of this serious matter should be debated. Members on all sides of the House should urge the government to be more proactive in seeking a fair settlement of the escalating labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*. Therefore, I urge all members respectfully to allow this debate to proceed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the hon. leader of the third party certainly complied with all the rules of bringing notice to the Assembly with respect to this matter in terms of circulating it and rising with the appropriate notice, but it now requires unanimous consent to waive the routine of the day to proceed with it.

[Unanimous consent denied]

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 17, 18, 19, and 20.

[Motion carried]

Housing for Child Welfare Clients

Q17. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

How many children with child welfare status have been housed in hotel rooms in the Edmonton region between February 18, 1999, and April 5, 2000?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond that the government will accept Written Question 17 and will respond following.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that information, as does my colleague.

[Written Question 17 carried]

Housing for Child Welfare Clients

Q18. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

How many children with child welfare status have been housed in jail cells, remand centres, or single men's hostels between February 18, 1999, and April 5, 2000, in the province?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond that the government will accept Written Question 18 as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're on a good roll this afternoon, so I appreciate the hon. minister's reply. Thank you.

[Written Question 18 carried]

Housing for Child Welfare Clients

Q19. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

In which hotels in the Edmonton region were children who were receiving services under the Child Welfare Act housed between February 18, 1999, and April 5, 2000?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, once again I'm pleased to rise and indicate that the government will accept Written Question 19.

MR. DICKSON: I just wanted to make this observation, Mr. Speaker. This information has been sought in the past without success, and it's been a great frustration to members of the opposition. I wanted to specifically acknowledge the fact that this minister has found a way to be able to share the information. I wanted to particularly recognize that this is a departure from the past practice of the government, and that should be signaled.

Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: You bet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the minister coming forward with this information.

[Written Question 19 carried]

3:00 Child Welfare Appeals

Q20. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What are the reasons for appeal and breakdown of decisions reached in the 485 appeals heard by the child welfare citizens' appeal panel during the 1998-99 fiscal year?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond that the government will accept Written Question 20.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a fine day in this Legislature, and I thank the minister for being forthcoming with the information.

[Written Question 20 carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it is my pleasure to move that Motions for Returns appearing on the Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 29, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 41, 42, 43, and 46.

[Motion carried]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M29. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of handwritten notes of a meeting between Jim Dinning, Allister McPherson, and Nader Ghermezian dated January

28, 1994, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall, WEM, as listed on page 9 of the affidavit of records of the WEM corporate defendants, November 30, 1999.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, once again, as this pertains to a situation that is before the courts, we are not able to respond and, therefore, will be rejecting this motion.

I wanted to make a comment. At the beginning the members opposite were delighted with the response from the Minister of Children's Services on written questions, and I said across the House that if the question is written so we can respond, then we are delighted to provide the information. But when we're into a situation of a legal case, court proceedings, hon. members opposite know that we are in a difficult position to get involved because of the fact that there is a court case going on right now. So we will have to reject this motion for a return.

MR. DICKSON: I'm disappointed with that response from the minister. I thought we were making such good progress and that we were going to be able to follow the lead of the Minister of Children's Services, but it appears we're going to have to spend some time this afternoon.

The difficulty with this is that it's a bit of a smokescreen to say that because there's pending litigation and the province is a litigant in a court case, we can't share this document. Let's be really clear. This is not a written question for information. This is a motion for a return. It means we want to see a particular document.

Now, the document is identified in the affidavit of records by Raphael Ghermezian, which has been filed in the action between West Edmonton Mall Property Inc., WEM Holdings Inc., and WEM Management Inc., plaintiffs by counterclaim, and Alberta Treasury Branches. The document is listed on the affidavit of documents. It's tab 113, and it says: "handwritten notes of a meeting between Jim Dinning, Allister McPherson, and Nader Ghermezian."

Mr. Speaker, we know the record exists. We know it was tabled as part of the production in that civil action. So all that we're asking is for the government of the province of Alberta to provide a copy of that document. We're not asking them to make a statement which could in any way compromise their legal position. We're not asking them to do anything which would be prejudicial in any way to the government of the province of Alberta. All we're saying is: the document exists; why wouldn't you share it?

We have to start wondering why they would refuse to turn over that document. The fact that it's part of a pending court case, frankly, is irrelevant. The people also have a right to know.

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

MR. WICKMAN: To close debate, Mr. Speaker, I won't repeat what the Member for Calgary-Buffalo has said. I anticipated the response. I will close debate by saying that I'm very, very disappointed in the minister's refusal to accept the motion.

[Motion for a Return 29 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M31. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of cabinet agenda and attachments dated March 12, 1996, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again, because of the court proceedings that are under way, we have been given advice by our legal advisors that we cannot get involved in this debate. I take exception to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo's comments that we are trying to do something untoward. He knows perfectly well, coming with a legal background, that when there has been litigation commenced, if outsiders or the public get involved in that, the case can be skewed.

That's not to say that the public won't see the end result and see the documentation down the road, but when you're in the middle of a litigation – and he has seen this firsthand in other cases or has been able to read about them, where political parties get involved in decisions before courts and skew the case. We're not prepared to do that. That's why there's a general rule that when something is before the courts, we stay out of it. We don't get involved in that.

We will not be able to accept this motion for a return because, again, it is before the courts. So we'll be rejecting it, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: I'd just make this observation. I think the minister confuses somebody making comment about a matter before the courts and producing a simple document. The document speaks for itself. What she says is absolutely correct if we were to be asking a minister for an opinion, advice, that sort of thing. We're not asking for any of those things. We're asking for a single document. It exists. It's been identified.

The minister should have more confidence in the judges of the Court of Queen's Bench of this province. Nothing they do is going to be impaired by sharing with us a document which is already part of the lawsuit, and if she's getting that legal advice, that's pretty scary.

MRS. NELSON: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Point of order.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

MRS. NELSON: I have to make it very clear. I don't want the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to in any way interpret that I do not have complete faith in the justice system and the judiciary of this province. They have done a wonderful job, and they serve us well. I think it's wrong for you to twist that around, and I won't tolerate that in this House. I have complete faith in the judiciary system in this province and support it completely and respect the process. So I will not have you play a political game by intimidating me by telling people I don't have faith in the justice system, because that's wrong.

THE SPEAKER: Well, on this point of order, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MR. DICKSON: The minister's words speak for themselves. Her initial comments are on the record, and others will be the judge of them.

Debate Continued

MR. WICKMAN: Again, to close debate, Mr. Speaker, I won't repeat the words of the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, who has said it very, very wisely. Again, I'm very, very disappointed that the minister uses the courts as an excuse when it's not necessary.

[Motion for a Return 31 lost]

3:10

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M32. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of correspondence from Stockwell Day to Triple Five Group Ltd., Nader Ghermezian, dated June 30, 1998, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 40 of the affidavit of records of West Edmonton Mall, WEM, dated November 30, 1999.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we will be rejecting this motion as it again pertains to the court cases that are under way, and we will not intrude in that arena. We hear the argument: we just want documents so we can stand there. I've seen so many times when members of the opposition take a document out of context, run around and play a political game with it. There's too much at stake with the province's position in this whole judicial process to have political games played. We've seen them today already. Therefore, we will be rejecting this motion for a return.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, again I must say that I'm very, very disappointed. The minister is beginning to sound like a broken record, and I anticipate we're going to continue to see this time after time. Possibly if we had the Member for Sherwood Park responding, she would at least show some favour.

[Motion for a Return 32 lost]

Electricity Deregulation

M36. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Resource Development between May 25, 1999, and April 3, 2000, evaluating the impact of electricity deregulation on the utility bills of various classes of Alberta consumers.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is rejecting Motion for a Return 36.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Calder has repeatedly asked questions in the House on the impact of deregulation on the utility bills. He has made a case that there is reason to be concerned. Copies of all studies and reports give us the opportunity also to confirm that the minister has some direction as to where he's headed and that he's not just doing it blindly. It's very, very disappointing, and it just leaves us in a situation where we continue to be very skeptical of the results of the deregulation of energy in the province.

[Motion for a Return 36 lost]

Mineral Revenue Information System

M37. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all studies and reports prepared by or for the Department of Resource Development between January 1, 1999, and April 3, 2000, evaluating the cost-effectiveness of the mineral revenue information system, MRIS.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Forestry.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is rejecting Motion for a Return 37.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, to conclude. I have to conclude myself that the government has simply not done the necessary studies and reports before they plunged ahead. They've done it blindly. They've left us in the dark, they've left the public in the dark, and possibly they're in the dark themselves. Again, very disappointing.

[Motion for a Return 37 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M38. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of cabinet agenda and minutes dated February 6, 1996, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talked about a broken record. Well, I don't know how many hundreds of times now on motions for returns that pertain to this court case we have had to say that we cannot accept these motions for returns while this court case is pending and under way. I don't know how many times you have to tell them that.

This is another question that pertains to affidavits, et cetera, that are pertaining to that case, and we must reject this.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, if it weren't every question that the minister responded to and rejected using the courts as a basis, maybe one could give some credibility that periodically she would be correct. But when the minister blindly uses the same argument for every motion for a return, then it leaves one very skeptical that the courts are simply being used as an excuse.

[Motion for a Return 38 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M41. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of minutes dated July 20, 1994, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 33 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again this is another motion for a return that pertains to "the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999." I don't know how much clearer that makes it. This is part of a legal case that is going on. If you would read the questions and ask what you're asking us, you would realize very clearly that we are not able to participate in giving this information out while this case is under way. If you would like to have the same response that was given earlier of accepting written questions, word the question so it's something that we in fact can give you and quit bringing back questions when you know perfectly well we can't file that information. Therefore, we are rejecting this motion for a return.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, let me just make it really clear. There

is no legal impediment to the government of the province of Alberta providing this document. There is no statute law and there is absolutely no regulation that prohibits the production of the document. The only thing that stands between the public of Alberta having access to this document is the fact that the government chooses not to share it.

This is an affidavit of records that is in the court record. This minister and her government have the ability and the power without any legal impediment to share the record, and if they choose not to, well, let them take the heat and have the courage to stand and say: we choose not to share the document. But, for pete's sake, let's not have some suggestion that their hands are tied in some way, that they'd be breaking some law, or that somehow they would be prejudicing the interests of taxpayers by not sharing the information. That is utter nonsense, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo has said it very, very well, and I'll leave it at that.

[Motion for a Return 41 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M42. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of excerpts of the agenda and priorities committee agenda, with attachments, dated October 18, 1993, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 34 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, because this pertains to the exact same situation, we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 42.

I want to comment on Calgary-Buffalo. He knows perfectly well that he can go down, if he wants to, to the courthouse and request that information and pay for it to be produced there. What he wants to play is a little political game of doing this, and I'm not going to do that.

So we will be rejecting this motion for a return, and we will not have politicians interfering in the judicial system.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, methinks I've heard that record before. The Member for Calgary-Buffalo does not play political games. He has made good arguments as to why it can be released, and the minister fails to heed it.

[Motion for a Return 42 lost]

West Edmonton Mall Refinancing

M43. Mr. Wickman moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of minutes dated March 21, 1994, pertaining to the refinancing of West Edmonton Mall as listed on page 33 of the affidavit of records of Her Majesty the Queen in right of Alberta dated November 30, 1999.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Government Services.

MRS. NELSON: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You talk about political games. The previous motion talked about page 34; this one talks about page 33. I mean, just so you can have a whole slew of motions for returns on the Order Paper. Again the same scenario. This is before the courts, and if people think that the opposition is not playing political games with this, they're not reading the Order Paper, because this goes page by page by page. Naturally we have to again, with the same answer, reject the motion for a return because this is before the courts. But that's an example of the political games that get played on the other side, to list one of these for every page of the affidavit, and that's wrong.

3:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If the minister will read the affidavit of records that's been filed in Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta, action number 9903-18469 – now, this is an affidavit of records filed by Robert A. Bhatia of the city of Edmonton, Assistant Deputy Provincial Treasurer. Remember; this gentleman works for us. He works for the people of the province of Alberta, and he has filed an affidavit of records.

Now, here's what's interesting. These are documents which the government does not object to producing for purposes of the lawsuit, and here's the document right here. It's number 007, excerpts of minutes, and we've got the date and so on, so it's all here.

You know, the province would sooner send people scurrying around to courthouses trying to get records. The reality, as this minister well knows . . .

MRS. NELSON: Do you know where the courthouse is, Gary?

MR. DICKSON: I know where the Law Courts is in the city of Edmonton, but I don't have a staff . . . [interjections]

THE SPEAKER: Please, please. The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

MR. DICKSON: I remember this is the government that at one time – they've lost their way – talked about making information accessible to Albertans, talked about one-window, one-door access to government services. This was the government that talked about making it easier for citizens of this province to be able to get information on how their tax dollars are spent or, in the case of West Edmonton Mall, misspent.

Now we have the minister saying the most insulting thing I can imagine, because when she says that to us, she says it to Albertans. She's saying it to the 3 million people in this province who want to find out how their tax dollars are being spent. She's effectively saying: you know, you go down to the courthouses, and if you live in Pincher Creek, Alberta, you travel to Edmonton and you wait in line and you pay the money to access the court record. That's the only way you're going to find out what the government of the province of Alberta is filing on their behalf.

You know, if you want to put out hurdles and make it as difficult as possible for Albertans to find out how their tax dollars are being misspent, you're doing an excellent job, Madam Minister, through the Speaker, because that's what this is all about, and that's the obstruction we have seen this afternoon. We can sum it all up together and say: this is a question of obstruction and simply making it as difficult as possible for Albertans to access information.

Thank you very much.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me say that it's with a great deal of disappointment that I have to acknowledge that I

batted 100 percent in the wrong direction, while my colleague over here has batted 100 percent in the right direction. Again I must say that I'm very, very disappointed that not one of the motions for returns was accepted.

THE SPEAKER: Don't feel bad, hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I've had those kinds of days too.

[Motion for a Return 43 lost]

Employment Initiatives for AISH Recipients

M46. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of requests for proposals for employment program initiatives designed for assured income for the severely handicapped and assured support program recipients since February 28, 1999.

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, it's a good day for playing ball, Mr. Speaker, because I'm on the winning team right now, and Edmonton-Rutherford owes me supper if I bat 100 percent. So we're going for this motion for a return with great hopes, and I hope it's an expensive place for supper.

Thank you.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know. I don't know. Okay. All right. What the heck. Sure, I'll accept.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert to close the debate.

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Absolutely to close. Since Lent is over, I think I'll even have a glass of wine with that meal, which has nothing to do with the motion. In all seriousness, because I'm sure my colleague will read *Hansard* today, I do appreciate the acceptance of this motion.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: I wish to advise the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert that the victory is not here yet. The House still has to vote.

[Motion for a Return 46 carried]

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, hon. members. This place can work when it wants to. Thank you.

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

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

Bill 206

School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Livingstone-MacLeod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'd like to just finish with a few comments that I started yesterday in Committee of the Whole and beg the indulgence of the committee just to talk about something that came forward into the public since this bill received second reading. That particular document was a report that was released by the Task Force on Children at Risk. It was titled *Start Young, Start Now*, and in this report there are several recommendations that Bill 206 either partly or wholly addresses.

The reason I bring this up is that the task force was created to examine issues facing children at risk, including but not limited to those who are at risk of developing violent behaviour. I think that Bill 206 is broader in focus, dealing with all children in a learning environment, but certainly it deals with those kids who are at risk and who might be prone to violence.

The first step of the recommendations fell under "Developing healthy kids," and in that section recommendation 5 was to "make sure schools are ready when a crisis occurs." This includes implementing "a comprehensive crisis response plan" and training teachers "to identify students who may be at risk" and referring them to "appropriate professionals."

Included in Bill 206 in section 2(3) and (4) are provisions that require schools to "provide counseling for students where appropriate," and to "include penalty options which enable students to continue pursuing their studies."

3:30

Now, with reference to this, it's interesting to note that the Alberta School Boards Association, when it comes to counseling, made a comment to me that there are not enough funds available for counseling and that they're a little worried about this provision. But I'm sure that as this particular report goes through the process, it will identify that more funds be provided for counseling, where appropriate, for students. I see that as something that's being positive and coming down the road and being available for school boards to address in the long term.

This counseling and those school alternatives will ensure that students will get the help when they need it, even if it means an alternative outside a school environment, where possible. As well, a school code of conduct puts in writing which behaviour is and is not tolerated in schools, and this means that situations will be handled swiftly and disruption will be kept to a minimum and students who need help will get it.

The code of conduct that I'm proposing will also directly address recommendation 9 from the task force, which also falls under the section "Developing healthy kids." This states that we must "take steps to prevent and protect children and youth from abuse, violence, bullying and gang activities" in schools and communities. As I stated in second reading of Bill 206, in section 2 boards must have in writing a policy dealing with these activities. This will make it explicitly clear that these activities are not allowed nor tolerated in schools. A code of conduct fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone knows what is expected of them. This goes back to the idea that students have the right to a stable learning environment and a safe school but also the responsibility of maintaining that environment by following the rules that they established, not rules that are established for them.

Madam Chairman, those are just a few areas of the task force report that Bill 206 will address. The basic idea is ensuring students are safe at school and that they can also receive help if they need it, and this is really the main thrust of the bill.

Now, Madam Chairman, since drafting the bill, I have received valuable input from constituents, colleagues, and even a few comments from the opposition. As I said before, the foundation of

this bill is solid, and I think the input I have received will add strength to the legislation. My focus is on Alberta schools and students to ensure that they are safe and cared for in a stable and supportive place so that our young people can grow. So I'm welcoming comments or amendments from any hon. members that they wish to put forward.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman. At this time I'd like maybe the table officers to distribute an amendment that I had duly authorized by Parliamentary Counsel.

While we do that, I'd like to speak briefly in support of Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, 2000. Essentially, I guess part of the reason why I support this is because in today's day and age we seem to be hearing more and more with respect to unacceptable conduct and violence and threats within our school system. Quite frankly, I think that something needs to be done in terms of standardizing, perhaps, suggestions with respect to a code of conduct so that everybody takes it seriously within the province. It's one thing to say, "Well, you know, all of the boards do have some policy," but if you ask them to produce it, sometimes it's difficult to find. Perhaps they have a lot of experience over the years but nothing in writing that really specifies what is to happen.

There is one additional comment that I would like to make, and the mover of the bill might consider this, if he wants to. You know, after submitting my ideas for amendments, I'd feel a whole lot better if in fact there was some way of making it mandatory for schools to notify their boards when an incident occurs. We've had a few examples now of incidents that perhaps for one reason or another the principal may not have known how to handle. In some cases that I am aware of, the incident never does get reported back to the school board itself. So I would be a lot happier if the mover of the bill might consider even a further amendment with respect to that to make it mandatory that at least the school reports the incident back to the board. Because if you don't report it, then how do you know if you have a problem or how do you know whether or not you even have a standard way of looking after the process of handling a problem?

With those additional comments I'm going to now move to the amendments. Madam Chairman, will this amendment be called A1?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, we will deem this amendment A1.

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Now, essentially what this does, if we look at section 2, under 44.1(1), "A board shall develop and implement a written policy respecting student conduct which addresses the following activities." What I've done is added "but is not limited to" after "addresses." In other words, it's not only these activities. It's not limited to these activities, although these activities are listed there. Therefore, the first amendment deals with adding the words "but is not limited to" after the word "addresses". It would then read, "A board shall develop and implement a written policy respecting student conduct which addresses, but is not limited to, the following activities." So that's how that first amendment would work.

The second part of that amendment would add section (h), which I believe is an extremely important part that maybe was missed, because we hear so much now about threats and intimidation. You know, it doesn't have to be physically present in the school itself.

It can come from the Internet. It can come through fax machines. It can come through e-mails. It can come through letters. It can come in many different ways. So section (h) would add "threats or intimidation of any kind against another person" to the list that the hon. member has proposed in the bill.

I would ask for your support with respect to these amendments and would also ask the mover of the bill to consider whether or not the reporting of incidents should be mandatory with respect to informing the board that something has taken place. We're hearing these days that some of these threats happen but that the board doesn't know about them.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

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

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont for the amendments. I believe that in this particular situation adding "but is not limited to" will relieve some of the concern that the Alberta School Boards Association had about this bill being too restrictive. Adding item (h), "threats or intimidation of any kind against another person" to the list will also add a new dimension to this bill that is very, very important and something that I didn't think about.

3:40

The member's comment regarding notification to the school board by a principal when an action took place in a school is an interesting concept, and I hadn't thought of that. I was mostly thinking about a code of conduct that is developed by a school with the school council, the parent council, principals, staff, and teachers all being involved. In thinking quickly about this, if the principal is going to be involved in developing this grassroots, school-based code of conduct, that's something that could be incorporated within the code of conduct, being reported directly to the school board. So there is some flexibility within this bill at the grassroots level to put those types of things in. In order to keep the momentum of the bill going, I would suggest that principals then look at putting that provision into a code of conduct at the local level for their own protection.

With that, Madam Chairman, I support these amendments and ask all members to support Calgary-Egmont's amendments on Bill 206.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Could I have unanimous consent to recognize the member that I failed to recognize?

[Unanimous consent granted]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

MS PAUL: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I guess sitting way back here in the corner you don't see me that readily.

Yes, I'm standing to speak, obviously, to the amendments that the hon. member made in adding the clause "threats or intimidation of any kind against another person" after part (g). I do support that wholeheartedly.

I think we have found that a bill like Bill 206, School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act, brought in by the hon. member, is actually very appropriate at this time, when we've seen a lot of tragedies in our schools not only across Canada but across the States as well. I think it does take the involvement of the school boards, obviously, to buy into and support policies that are made with respect to conduct and discipline in our school systems.

The reporting mechanism is absolutely key. We have to have that

open line, whether it be through the Legislative Assembly, whether it be through the school systems, whether it be through the School Act, to implement and do some straightforward planning, whether the planning, unfortunately, be in crisis intervention, perhaps before there is a tragedy, or simply something that gives the school board a source of information with respect to what is happening in their schools that they are the elected officials to represent in the community. If there are tragedies that are occurring, we all have to take responsibility and try to make a safe place for our youth to learn and to go to school and feel safe and learn what is needed to be done.

This bill is also very timely with respect to the task force that was done under the Minister of Children's Services. Start Young, Start Now reflects the crises with children at risk, and I think it's a very, very appropriate title: Start Young. That is where it seems that any violent situations, any bullying, any carrying-ons in schools do start.

I applaud the member for bringing the bill forward, and I applaud the Member for Calgary-Egmont for his amendments. I think they're very timely and very appropriate. So with those few comments I'll take my seat.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?

[The clauses of Bill 206 as amended agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Opposed? Carried.

Are you agreed that the committee now rise and report?

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. SHARIFF: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following with some amendments: Bill 206. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So carried.

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

Bill 207 Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act

[Debate adjourned April 18: Mr. White speaking]

MR. JACQUES: Madam Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise and

speak on Bill 207, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act, that's been sponsored by the Member for Edmonton-McClung. At the outset I'd like to say that I'm not going to be supporting this bill for various reasons.

As I was looking through the principle of this bill, I was reminded of I think it was a television series called the Jerry Seinfeld show. There was a bunch of characters in the show, and the whole show was about a nothing. There were characters by the names of Elaine and Kramer and some other characters, and it was all formatted on a nothing. There was no substance to it. So when you look at the principle of the bill, one has to look at it: does the principle have some substance, or is it a nothing? Well, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, in this particular case the substance of the bill is nonexistent, so you're left with a nothing.

I reflect on the comments by the Member for Edmonton-Calder, who was speaking to this. He said that it "is not the be-all and end-all." Well, I think we all would concur with that comment because it's a nothing, and if it's a nothing, then it can't do anything. So here we are, ironically, with a bill that's before us that is a nothing.

In fairness, whether our political philosophies are different or our ideologies are different, if a bill comes forward and it has merit, has substance, has some principles, and it's clearly with objectives, then I think most members of this Assembly take a look at it on the basis of: yeah, okay; let me look at it on the basis of what the bill says and what the bill is trying to achieve. In other words, there's some kind of very related outcomes, some benchmarks. So when I read Bill 207, I was trying to go through this process of saying: you know, I'm sorry; I seem to come up here with a nothing. If it's a nothing, then why is the bill in front of us?

3:50

So I then tried to put some tests to it. I said: well, you know, maybe I'm really reading this wrong; maybe I've got the wrong end of the stick on this one. So I said: what is this kind of constituent concern that is being raised by the hon. member to bring forward this debate in the Legislative Assembly as a private member's bill? Now, remember, Madam Speaker, that a private member's bill is not a bill of the opposition. It is not a bill of the opposition. It is a bill of a private member. But the interesting thing is that when you read through *Hansard* and you look at the comments of the leader and I believe it was the Member for Edmonton-Manning and the Member for Edmonton-Calder, you quite clearly see it's not a private member's bill. It's a Liberal-sponsored philosophy, principle, and quite clearly. That's fair enough. They've said that it is, and that's fair, although it is, as I said, a private member's bill.

So here we have a Liberal philosophy that is a nothing. Then I went through and said: well, if it's a nothing, then why would the member draft and introduce legislation that lacks any form of either objective or rationale? You then come through and you say: "Well, okay. Again let's put some tests to it. Does it improve the delivery of government services to the citizens of this fair province?" You look at it and say: no, because it's a nothing. So then you say, "Well, does it help clarify something for the people of Alberta?" and again you say: no, because it's a nothing. Then you say: does it remedy something from a legislative gap prospective? Well, again nothing. Then you say: well, does it update and modernize or in some way change an existing act for the benefit of Albertans? No. Nothing. Then you ask the question: well, does it bring forward a new idea, a new concept that's going to keep our province on the leading edge of innovation, that's going to make us be admired throughout Canada, throughout even North America? Again, you answer no because you've got a nothing.

Then you have to come back again and say: well, gee, what's the

motivation here? Then you look at the bill and you look at the specifics of the bill. It says that the Treasurer is going to prepare an annual report, that it's going to be based on an assumption, and that assumption is going to reflect an arbitrary percentage of personal income taxes that would be available to municipalities. Not could be, not will be, but might be, maybe. I don't know. It's an arbitrary percentage. So you come back: you've got a nothing bill with an arbitrary percentage.

Then you look at it and say: well, this arbitrary percentage and this method of talking about it could be selected in one of two ways. The first way is that we would debate and vote on a motion that would be moved by the Provincial Treasurer. The Provincial Treasurer is going to select an arbitrary percentage. He's going to reach out, get an arbitrary percentage, and he's going to introduce it in the Legislature. So we have an arbitrary percentage in a nothing bill. Now, if the Legislative Assembly in its wisdom decides not to deal with this arbitrary percentage by June 15, then the Treasurer would choose an arbitrary percentage. Then he would bring that arbitrary percentage back to the Assembly for endorsement. So, again, what have you got? Nothing.

Again, when you look at it, the interesting thing about the bill is that every year you're going to go through this. Every year you're going to deal with a nothing, and every year you're going to deal with an arbitrary percentage. You know, again you come back and say: okay; let me kind of get a handle on this. Let's say, for example, that personal income taxes were \$4 billion in a year, and let's say that this arbitrary percentage was 10 percent. So 10 percent times \$4 billion. Gee, is that \$400 million? I think so. You know, it doesn't take too much to calculate that, and we know that if it was 20 percent, then it would be \$800 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: Let's go for 5.

MR. JACQUES: A good question. What if it was 5? Well, gee whiz, that might be \$200 million.

So here we have this kind of report and this arbitrary percentage that are going to be debated but can't do anything. It's going to be in legislation requiring this Legislative Assembly to debate and, again, can't do anything. But with the stroke of a pen and in our mind we can say that 10 percent, for example, of \$4 billion is \$400 million. So do we need an act to say that this is how you calculate 10 percent of \$4 billion, for example?

Again, you come back and say: well, what's the purpose? Well, again I'm not sure here. I think we've got a nothing. Not only that, but we're going to produce an annual report that is going to be based on an assumption, and the assumption is going to be arbitrary. So if you have an assumption and the roots of the assumption are arbitrary and it can't do anything, then do you have a nothing? You know, I'm trying to work through the principles of this.

Now, the other interesting thing. If you carry the extension of that, in the bill it says that "the Provincial Treasurer shall assume." He shall assume, not calculate, not based on a formula. He doesn't do it on the basis of consulting. He assumes. It's not even based on the phases of the moon. He assumes. So now we're going to have an assumption of an arbitrary, of a nothing in legislation.

So, again, you come back to the question. You've got the assumption, you've got the arbitrary things, and you've got the nothing. Now, how does this really relate back to something that you would say to the municipalities? Does it really make sense that municipalities could – not will but could – receive, assuming the province allocated it, an arbitrary portion of personal tax revenue? Now, you can't do it. All you can do is assume it. Okay? You can't do it; you can assume it. Again you come back and say: well, gee

whiz, if we're going to assume something on an arbitrary basis, why can't we just calculate that? I mean, I could table a report that says: "Hey, here's the assumption. Here's the calculation. Want some information? Here it is."

Then you get into the real crux of the question: does that report really facilitate some better form of co-operation, some better form of understanding between the provincial and the municipal governments? Does this report, that again is a nothing based on arbitrary percentage and assumptions, help clarify the existing funding streams that we have? Again, I think the answer to that is no. Most importantly, I think, does it help introduce some stability into provincial/municipal funding arrangements, which could very well be the objective that the author of the bill had in mind? Again, you can't answer the question and say yes; you can only answer no to the question. So if you go through all of this and you ask those questions and you quite clearly come up with no, then you're back to the nothing and you're back to the fundamental question: why is this legislation in front of us?

Again you ask the question: does this in some way bring more accountability to the existing funding streams, particularly as it relates to the business planning processes which are recognized by this Legislature and recognized by virtually all provincial governments across Canada as a leading role that Alberta has taken in this regard? Does this somehow complement this leading role? Again, no. Does it in some way bring to the table the municipal concerns that need to be addressed through discussion and consultation with the provincial government? That's a very legitimate question. It's a very legitimate process. But does this help it? No. In no way, shape, or form.

Then we get back to a very critical area and say: does the report, based on these assumptions, based on this arbitrary thing, improve the overall system of municipal grants and funding? Again, I think any rational person working through this on any rational basis would only come up with the conclusion of no.

Of course, the primary example of why this can't happen and why it's a nothing bill is because a money bill cannot be put forward by a private member. That's the bottom line of it. So what you have is a thinly disguised veil of something that is a nothing. Other than bringing, if you like, quote, the issue to the Legislature floor for purposes of debate, although we're not quite sure what we're debating in terms of, if you like, what could have been an objective but can't be an objective because of the restrictions that we place under our Standing Orders on how we conduct our business, then why is it here? I'm not sure.

4:00

I think that in time, Madam Speaker, there will be researchers who are looking at the debate history. They will look at milestones. Educators will look at this body over time and say: where are the meaningful milestones of the debate and the introduction of bills into this Legislature, particularly as it relates to private bills? Well, I'm afraid the example that is going to be put forward as not the best example could very well be this bill. It really goes back to the nothing. It goes back to the assumptions. It goes back to the arbitrary thing. It doesn't meet any of the acid tests that normally we as legislators and I think all citizens in this province would look at from the point of view of saying that it's meaningful to this Legislative Assembly and to the citizens of this province.

The interesting thing is that it can't be a money bill. Even if it were a money bill – and you can't stretch that into debate because it isn't a money bill. It goes back to the principle that if indeed it was, again the basic question would be: do you want this assumption, this arbitrary number that would be applied for purposes of determining funding that would go to municipal governments?

Remember that it is personal income taxes only that this bill is

targeting. If you took the position of taxation on a personal basis, if the people of this province said, "We don't want personal taxes or we want them really down," do we want a funding formula – we can't have the funding formula because this is not a money bill. But if it were, would you really want a funding formula that would be tied to a taxation system that hopefully over time will result in far less funding through this provincial government by taking less money out of the people of this province? That is a very fundamental question that I think is at odds, if you like, with the fundamental principle that isn't in this bill because it can't be in this bill because it's not a money bill. Therefore, you're back to the nothing.

So I would suggest, Madam Speaker, that probably the time has come to put the bill out of its misery. Let's get on with some meaningful business in this Legislature, and let us defeat this bill at the earliest opportunity.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my privilege to add my comments on Bill 207, which is the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act. What the bill does is provide the municipalities with access to a portion of the provincial personal income tax base, allocates a percentage of provincial personal income tax revenues to municipalities on a per capita basis beginning in the fiscal year 2000-2001. It allows the province to restructure provincial grant programs. Allocations to municipalities would be population based and determined pursuant to agreements by the AUMA and the AAMDC.

Now, Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to sit on Edmonton city council for nine years, and I know there are many other members of this House, including yourself, who had the distinct privilege and honour of representing the local taxpayer at the municipal level. I'm not sure about your particular municipality, but when I attended the AUMA conferences and the AAMDC conventions and the Federation of Mayors and Municipalities convention and such, one of the common threads, in fact one of the very first resolutions I ever proposed in attending AUMA, was a revenue-sharing formula based on oil revenues. The reason for that was that common concern that was expressed by municipal leaders across the country.

Grants that were given by the provincial governments were generally done on a sort of conditional basis. In other words, there would be a \$12 per capita base for recreation, social programs, and so on. There would be transportation programs, 75 percent and 25 percent, 90 percent and 10 percent, but all conditional. The 90 percent and 10 percent was conditional upon the roadway being a certain type of roadway. At times we as municipal leaders, elected representatives, felt like we were beggars with our hands out, and the province would throw us crumbs. Some municipal councillors would get the inferiority complex that we were in fact a junior government, that the provincial government was the municipal government.

MRS. SOETAERT: It was insulting.

MR. WICKMAN: It was very, very insulting.

Over the years municipalities have constantly cried to the provincial government: let's form a partnership; let's be a partnership; let's recognize each other as being equal. One of the greatest shortcomings in terms of equality, of course, is access to revenues. The provincial government basically has unlimited access to revenue. For example, when the provincial government decides they

need more money, what do they do? They stick in VLT machines. When they need more money: more VLT machines, slot machines.

MR. DICKSON: We get to talk about that on the next bill, Bill 208.

MR. WICKMAN: On the next bill, that will come up. Exactly.

They stick a fee on liquor, stick user fees on licences, tax this, tax that. But municipalities are very, very limited in the areas that they can tax, and they become very, very dependent on municipal taxation through property taxation, and that creates a problem. That creates a problem in the sense that the other levels of government – and I won't call them senior levels of government, because they're not senior; they're equal levels of government – are in the position, because of the strong economy across the country and here in Alberta, that there are surpluses. The government is able to balance budgets, and the government is able to say: "We have surpluses, and we can put a little bit of money here and a little bit of money there. We can do this. We can do that. We can download onto the municipalities and take away about half of their revenues that were flowing down, thereby saving us all of that money." The federal government as well has a tendency to do the same thing, unfortunately, to the provinces, as in health care, and we continuously cry, recognizing that the federal government has to accept the responsibility as well.

You look at the municipalities. When they come to prepare their budget and they suddenly realize they're going to have a deficit, they can't operate at a deficit. They're not allowed by law to operate at a deficit. They can't turn around and say, "Well, we're going to come up with this new system of taxation to get more revenue by putting VLTs in the hotels and the cafes," or whatever they may do that would be in a sense additional revenue. They can't download. They can't turn around and say: well, we're going to reduce the amounts of money that go to the school boards. They can't do that. That's where the buck stops, and you, Madam Speaker, would realize that fully. I don't have to give you a sermon or preach to you, because you fully understand, having been there.

Now, what this particular bill attempts to do is recognize that residents in the various municipalities pay income tax. I don't have the figures, but if you look, for example, at Edmonton and you look at how much money went from Edmonton into the current provincial coffers in the form of personal income tax – and these are people that live in Edmonton – it would amount to hundreds of millions of dollars. I won't say billions of dollars but hundreds of millions of dollars. Why shouldn't the municipality have a share of that? Why shouldn't they have a certain percentage?

MR. DICKSON: There's no good reason.

MR. WICKMAN: No, there isn't, except there's a disadvantage to the province in that the province can no longer treat them like puppets. In other words, the province can no longer say: "Well, you have to spend it here. You've got to spend it there. You have to do this. You have to do that." It would give the municipalities a little more independence than the provincial government would like to see them actually acquire.

MR. DICKSON: The province would have to negotiate.

MR. WICKMAN: They would have to negotiate. They would have to recognize them as being equal partners. They would have to recognize that they in fact serve the same type of function, that they are accountable to the same people, and so on and so forth.

The government has never made the case why they simply don't

cut the strings loose, recognize that there has to be a formula put in place so that revenue sharing can occur and so the municipalities can direct their own affairs and decide as to how these dollars are going to be spent.

4:10

When comments were made when this bill was dealt with earlier, the minister responded. He made a number of comments that I want to, again, respond to. The minister said:

The descriptive rhetoric used by the hon. member to describe this bill in no way reflects the speculation that appears in the paper. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, there is no resemblance between what's in this paper and what is being needed.

That's what the Minister of Municipal Affairs said on April 12.

However, the Leader of the Official Opposition, making it very clear, had indicated on April 5 in her remarks:

Unfortunately, because Bill 207 is a private member's bill, it is restricted from having a number of important elements, including a mechanism through which the municipalities would be able to access the income tax base. As all members are aware, private members' bills cannot deal specifically with money issues since nongovernment members are unable to introduce a money bill in the Legislature.

The member recognized that there is that shortcoming in the bill, and that shortcoming is in the bill because of the requirements that surround a private member's bill. So the minister should have been aware of that when the minister made his comments.

Also, I want to point out that the Premier of this province said on March 9 in *Alberta Hansard*: "A bill is the most important document that can ever be introduced in the Assembly." So we should never, never make light of a bill, whether it's a private member's bill, whether it's a government bill, whatever. Don't make light of it. It is a very, very important document.

On September 9, 1993, the Speaker of the House – he was not Speaker then; in 1993 I believe he was deputy Premier – made the statement: "There's provision here for the first time for private members to actually see their Bills made into law in the province of Alberta. That's quite remarkable." Those are the words of the present Speaker, who at that time was the deputy Premier.

Now, I can look at examples of private members' bills similar to Bill 207, one being Bill 205, the Debt Retirement Act of 1995, which was introduced at that particular time by Dr. Percy, the member for I believe at that time it was called Edmonton-Parkallen. Recognizing the previous precedent that has been set, we are extremely disappointed that government members would table *Alberta Liberal Caucus News* simply as a means to facilitate a point of order rather than engage in serious discussion on the merits of the proposal.

Then, Madam Speaker, the minister went on to say that very same day, April 12, in response to another comment that had been made: "We're reviewing the education property tax." In response to that, let me point out that despite the government's so-called review of the education property tax, the residential portion of the education property tax is projected to increase from \$651.2 million in 1995 to \$774.7 million in 2002, an increase of \$123.5 million, or 19 percent. Also, the 18 percent mill rate reduction on the residential assessment announced on January 26, 2000, which the government made a great deal about, putting their spin on it, actually amounted to a paltry figure, a \$22.50 reduction in provincial property taxes this year for a ratepayer with a residence assessed at \$125,000. A reduction of \$22.50.

When we talk in terms of the provincial government putting a 5 percent cap on increases and equalized assessment for residential properties, we recognize what's happened. In the city of Edmonton

we're going to see the city of Edmonton taxpayer paying an additional \$7.7 million in provincial property taxes in the year 2000. Now, make note of that. The city of Edmonton taxpayers will pay an additional \$7.7 million because of the 5 percent cap, and that \$7.7 million is used to subsidize other areas of the province where they exceeded that 5 percent cap. In other words, Edmontonians are not only subsidizing the provincial government and being denied their fair share of revenue, but now they have to turn around and subsidize other municipalities. Do you blame Mayor Bill Smith and members of Edmonton city council for mounting a campaign directing this shortcoming, this unfairness in equity to the Edmonton taxpayers? Those ads will be appearing shortly, and those ads will be urging Edmontonians to squawk to the provincial government about the unfairness.

MR. DICKSON: Why don't they just vote differently?

MR. WICKMAN: Why don't they vote differently? Well, in Edmonton they don't have a problem. They know how to vote. I'm sorry to mention this to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, but I think the problem is down in your part of the province.

This is an interesting one here. Now, in response to that particular statement, the only long-term solutions the government has publicly suggested for replacing the provincial education property tax are a 4 percent sales tax and a 38 percent increase in provincial income tax. Let me quote now the Minister of Municipal Affairs. "As a matter of fact, they've already shared the information that if we were to put in a sales tax" – you hear that? If we were to put in a sales tax, referring to themselves – "it would be somewhere in the area of 4 percent." Now, I don't think Albertans want to hear about a sales tax, whether it be 4 percent, 7 percent, whatever. Then he goes on to say that they've looked at the area of income tax and that it would mean a 30 percent increase in income tax. I'm sure the government can be a little more sensible, a little more creative than even referring to a 4 percent sales tax or a 38 percent increase in personal income tax.

The Member for Medicine Hat made an interesting concept in his Motion 518, introduced in the Legislative Assembly. Let me quote. This is his actual motion. You would think he was on this side of the House.

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore alternative means of funding education other than through municipal property taxes and to begin discussions with municipal governments to develop new cost-sharing formulas that could be implemented after the provincial government removes requisitions for school taxes.

Now, there's one member that is headed off in a similar direction to what Bill 207 is attempting to do. So we in fact are not speaking out here in isolation. We in fact not only would see the AUMA and the AAMDC welcome these types of initiatives, but I'm sure there's more than just the Member for Medicine Hat who has a similar type of philosophy.

Interestingly enough, the minister also said that same day – he was very talkative that day, obviously – that

it's important to note that the proportion of education funding derived from education property tax revenues has decreased from 50 percent in '94-95 to 38 percent this year. The facts speak for themselves.

That's what he said. Now, let me say that approximately 6 percent, or \$165 million, of the reduction in the proportion of education funding derived from the education property tax revenues between '94-95 and 2000-2001 is accounted for by the exemption of machinery and equipment, which benefits only a small number of

nonresidential ratepayers. So he was a bit loose with his statements there.

The minister then went on to say:

We've already agreed to work with municipalities as partners in clarifying provincial/municipal roles and responsibilities. In fact, Mr. Speaker, it's in our business plan.

This again is a quote from the Minister of Municipal Affairs on April 12. Let me point out, when we talk in terms of a willingness to work with the municipalities, what has happened. When asked by the Official Opposition what plans the government actually had to work with municipalities, the Premier referred only to the short-term funding proposals being worked on in the Premier's Task Force on Infrastructure.

Now, there's a great deal more discussion that has to occur with the municipalities than that one particular statement, Madam Speaker. There has to be a comprehensive discussion, a comprehensive recognition that we do have a level of government there that requires the loosening of legislative strings to allow it the flexibility, the independence that it requires.

Again let me point out some more interesting comments that the minister had to say that very same day. He's quoted as saying: "In fact, from '95 to '99 basic education spending – and that includes K to 12 – increased \$693 million and is continuing to increase." Now, let me just say in response that as a percentage of the GDP, an amount equal to about 4.1 percent of the Alberta GDP was invested in basic education in '92-93. By 2002-03, according to Budget 2000, that investment will just be 2.8 percent; in other words, a reduction from 4.1 percent down to 2.8 percent of the GDP. Now, that is not heading off in the right direction.

4:20

Again another comment the minister made that day in response to the comments from the Official Opposition.

In fact, eliminating grants and relying on a source of income that can be unpredictable and uncertain would create a situation where funding to municipalities would reflect the volatility of this tax base.

Madam Speaker, just listen to these words: "In fact, eliminating grants and relying on a source of income that can be unpredictable and uncertain." How would it be unpredictable and uncertain if there were a formula put into place, a recognition that the municipalities could in fact be dependent on a percentage? While not being able to pin it down to the exact amount of money, I tell you it would certainly be a lot less unpredictable or it would be a lot more predictable – let's put it that way – than some of the sources of revenue that the province has to rely on at the present time, like the oil revenues that we can see fluctuate anywhere from \$11, \$12 a barrel up to a high of \$36 a barrel. A great deal of the revenue of course is dependent on how much money Albertans want to gamble in the various forms of gambling opportunities that are allowed in the province. Certainly there would be some variation in the amounts of personal income tax that may be collected in the province, but nothing close to what we see in the other areas of revenue producing.

He goes on to say:

This government has committed to ensuring that Albertans pay the lowest income taxes in the country and has even speculated about the possibility of eliminating income taxes altogether. Where would that leave the municipalities?

Now, speculation about eliminating income taxes altogether. Let's get with it. This is not the state of Nevada yet. The state of Nevada may have been able to eliminate personal income tax because of their dependency on the megacasinos there that have up to 5,000 rooms and so on and so forth. But I don't think we're anywhere close to

that situation or that we'll ever see that situation in Alberta unless the provincial government has some type of agenda so that they do in fact intend to start replacing portions of the personal income tax with a sales tax and eventually have a sales tax high enough that there would be no need for . . . [interjections] Well, I know there's been that type of discussion, but I'll tell you right now: Albertans have enough of a problem with Bill 11. That would be the crowning touch. Need I say more?

I think I should close at that point.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes, hon. member. I hesitate to interrupt you, but under Standing Orders your time was up.

We have approximately six minutes until I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate, so I will recognize the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak on Bill 207, the Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Calculation Act, which is sponsored by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Having served as an elected member of a municipal government for 17 years and appreciating the level of autonomy that municipal governments enjoy as well as being able to look to the provincial government as a full partner in our joint responsibilities to the taxpayer, I found it rather puzzling when reading through Bill 207. Based on some of the debate I've heard, some other members have found it this way as well. This bill does nothing to either enhance that partnership nor to increase the independence of the municipalities. In fact, it has the opposite effect.

Madam Speaker, in my opinion, private members' bills offer MLAs the opportunity to propose innovative legislative solutions to problems that are of great concern to their constituents. Just this past fall two private members' bills, the Prevention of Youth Tobacco Use Act, sponsored by the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, and the Charitable Donation of Food Act, sponsored by the Member for Calgary-Bow, passed third reading. More recently, in fact only weeks ago, the Member for Red Deer-South successfully shepherded the Marriage Amendment Act through this Legislature.

So I find it very curious, then, in reading Bill 207 to find its topic deals with producing a report that would detail the effect of contributing an arbitrary percentage of an annual income tax revenue directly to the municipalities. If I understand it correctly, Bill 207 proposes to implement a new budget reporting mechanism based on assumption. Under the authority of this bill the Provincial Treasurer would prepare a report detailing the effect that sharing an assumed percentage of provincial income tax revenue with municipalities would have on Alberta's finances. This report would then be made public.

I'm left wondering what the intent of this legislation is. What purpose does it serve? What situation does it attempt to remedy, and how is the operation of government improved by the proposal contained in this bill? For that matter, what does it accomplish to produce a report that tells municipalities that if we decided to give you X percentage of an annual provincial income tax revenue, this is what would be the total? This certainly, in my opinion, is a confrontational approach to working with our municipal partners and an approach that our government rejects. I would suggest that if implemented, an unprecedented level of provincial/municipal discord would result. Does it not make more sense to engage municipalities in a discussion of the realities of how the province provides financial assistance, not hypothetical situations based on speculation?

Madam Speaker, I believe as an MLA we need to be honest, open,

and accountable to all Albertans. Dealing in hypothetical situations with what are essentially arbitrary numbers or producing meaningless reports based on assumptions is not a productive use of anyone's time. It only serves to cause confrontation, disagreement, and endless dispute about these reports to no specific end. What is accomplished by telling municipalities what the government could give them in financial support? I think municipalities are more interested in having the provincial government tell them what kinds of funding they will be receiving.

It's obvious in reading Bill 207 that the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung wanted to put forward a piece of legislation that would direct government expenditure and budgeting processes; in other words, construct a money bill. This of course, as we all know, she cannot do as a private member. Only government can propose money bills, Madam Speaker. So it seems that the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition has attempted to do a money bill without breaking this rule, through the back door so to speak, by having the government run a report that shows that if we spent the money, this is what impact it would have on the provincial coffers.

One of the serious problems that would be created should Bill 207 become law is entanglement of municipal and provincial tax policies. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, in introducing first reading of the bill, indicated that she felt it would – and I'll quote here from *Hansard*, March 1, page 187 – “move to more of a revenue-sharing model in our province as opposed to a children-of-the-province model.”

Actually, Bill 207 would lessen the independence of municipalities, not increase it, by tying municipal revenue to provincial tax policy decisions and any fluctuations in income tax that may arise. In years to come, when income tax revenues may decrease, the municipal government would be forced into the unenviable position of trying to make up such a shortfall. Interestingly enough, this is a danger that was recognized by the Leader of the Official Opposition as well. On January 26 she stated in an article that – and I quote – in the face of economic slowdown, which we are cautious of right now but we may be facing, the only place to accommodate that is to cut expenditures.

Madam Speaker, this bill contemplates reducing the stability of municipal funding that has been achieved through our present system. If income tax revenues drop, the corresponding reduction in the revenue transferred to municipalities would likewise drop as well. As a result, as the Leader of the Opposition admits, municipalities would be forced to make up the shortfall, most likely by cutting their expenditures. No one benefits from this. The provincial government would look bad because they're not transferring an appropriate amount of funding to municipalities. Municipalities would have to adjust their budgets to account for the reduction in revenue.

4:30

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but under Standing Order 8(5)(a), which provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private member's public bill, I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung to close debate.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would also like to thank all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly who have worked to speak to Bill 207 standing in my name on the Order Paper.

Madam Speaker, in summing up the discussion, the object of Bill 207 has been to provide local governments with access to a portion of provincial personal income tax revenues in order to create a more stable and predictable funding arrangement between the province

and local governments and to provide our municipalities with an enhanced ability to meet their priorities on a medium- and long-term basis in accordance with fulfilling their significant roles and responsibilities, many of which have been increased over the past decade with downloading from the province.

Bill 207 proposes to allocate a percentage of personal income tax revenues to Alberta municipalities on a per capita basis beginning in the fiscal year 2000-2001. This would allow the province to eliminate the very unstable and unpredictable grant programs, which of course have been reduced by about 50 percent over the last eight years. As well, it would provide a framework for an increased accountability, responsiveness, efficiency, fairness, a long-term planning cycle.

In fact, the province has maintained its tradition. Certainly it kept true to the view that the Progressive Conservative Party has had for many years of the municipalities being children of the province. We on this side of the House believe that there is an opportunity to look at a whole new relationship with our municipalities, and that is why we brought forward Bill 207.

Certainly I don't believe this is the only method of stable long-term funding; we think it is one. It is modeled on the experience of the province of Manitoba with its Provincial-Municipal Tax Sharing Act. Bill 207 is just one component of our initiative to create new and sustainable partnerships with our municipalities and predictable funding arrangements so that when the roles, the division of powers if you like, are clarified, then municipalities are given a stable long-term funding arrangement rather than the ad hoc one which they have to operate under now.

Madam Speaker, this is the only forum in which this rather huge issue is being discussed. As much as the government members have spent time criticizing Bill 207 as a solution, we believed it was important to bring the matter forward, and instead of criticizing, they might have been able to open the forum up so we could come to some solutions.

I was interested to note the Minister of Municipal Affairs and today the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti and the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills speaking about this doing nothing to enhance the partnership between the province and the municipalities. Madam Speaker, I thought I would table a letter which I received from Lorne Olsvik, who of course is the AUMA president. The letter is addressed to me. He wrote to us in regard to Bill 207, saying that the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, the very municipalities represented by many of the MLAs who have spoken here today,

appreciates the efforts of all Members of the Legislative Assembly through bills such as 207 to help municipalities become and remain more viable and self-sufficient. As you are aware the AUMA has adopted several guiding principles which are used to help us evaluate various Provincial programs, regulations and legislation. Our number one guiding principle is as follows:

Municipal Governments must have the fiscal capacity to fulfill their mandate through:

- primary access to the property tax base; and
- other stable long-term and progressive sources of revenue

The AUMA is pleased with the direction of Bill 207 in that it seeks to implement a component of AUMA's key guiding principle. Providing long-term and progressive sources of revenue for municipalities will go a long way to ensuring the viability of Alberta's communities.

So clearly the AUMA, which we see as a major stakeholder in this province and an important one for developing municipal policy, is certainly onside with the bill as a portion of dealing with the issue.

Madam Speaker, this bill is really a signal to our municipal leaders, one which we look forward to raising with them further.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:35 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Blakeman	Leibovici	Olsen
Bonner	MacBeth	Soetaert
Carlson	MacDonald	Wickman
Dickson		

Against the motion:

Amery	Graham	McFarland
Broda	Haley	Melchin
Burgener	Hierath	Nelson
Calahasen	Hlady	O'Neill
Cao	Jacques	Renner
Cardinal	Johnson	Severtson
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Doerksen	Langevin	Smith
Dunford	Lougheed	Strang
Evans	Mar	Tannas
Fischer	Marz	Thurber
Forsyth	McClellan	Zwozdesky
Fritz		

Totals:	For – 10	Against – 37
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[Motion lost]

Bill 208

Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's quite a pleasure to have both of these bills coming together as they are, Bill 207 and now 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000. It's interesting, because both bills address some of the issues which are at the core of our communities, are at the core of the kinds of communities that we want to have throughout our province, whether they be small urban or huge metropolitan centres. As we know, this whole issue of gaming has taken a very interesting turn in our province and has resulted in some impact on our communities that perhaps members and people of the public didn't have any idea that it would.

4:50

Interestingly, Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, is all about looking at our communities, looking at the kind of environment we want to create, the kind of environment we want our children to grow and mature in, and examines the whole issue of gaming and its impact on our values and our family values within the community that we see. Communities truly are the backbone of our province, Madam Speaker. That's certainly something that people have perhaps said without real meaning or at least without associating with the words how important a statement it is.

While we live and work in an environment where we have access to a worldwide web in terms of information, our companies trade and

market their products on a worldwide basis, information is right out there in terms of television and communication, and we have access to incredible information at a moment's notice worldwide, yet where we live in that world is right at home, in our communities. It is that focus which we in the opposition have been working on, have been talking to communities across the province about, and they result in these two bills coming as they do, in concert one with the other. Really Bill 207 and Bill 208, in their two pieces, recognize that Alberta's quality of life comes from the strength within our communities, our neighbourhoods where we live and raise our families.

Madam Speaker, it's perhaps coincidence that you are in the chair today, because we in the Official Opposition very much admired the work that you did as the chair of the task force on gaming, your report that was submitted in December of 1998, and the consultation method which was employed in that effort: the talking to other provinces and coming up with a solution, not just looking at Alberta, not being so sort of self-centred or ingrown to only look at Alberta, but looking at what other provinces had done, what things we could learn from other provinces, before coming to some very sound recommendations which led to the gaming and review report in December of 1998. So in the first instance, I want to compliment you, as the MLA for Lacombe-Stettler, for the very excellent work and contribution you made to this issue in our province.

I think it is important to perhaps look at some of the observations that made up the report of the gaming review. I know the committee that examined the issue learned a great deal from the province of Ontario, who of course had instigated some legislation earlier on this subject to deal with the gambling issues within their province.

I think it's important to note in the overview of illegal gaming and criminal activity that makes up a part of the report the very excellent quote from William Jahods*, who was an organized-crime figure, in testimony before the Chicago Crime Commission when he said – and I quote – there always existed one solid constant. Now, this is from the point of view of organized crime. He said: there always existed one solid constant; any new form of legal gambling always increased our client base. A very telling quote, Madam Speaker. Clearly the issue of gambling, certainly having always attracted issues of organized crime, is one where we have to be very careful and very diligent as legislators to ensure that the controls and the standards and the protection for our citizens and for our communities exist.

Clearly, illegal gambling is a multibillion-dollar industry. Huge financial profits make it most attractive to organized crime. Gambling is not illegal. However, participating in the business unlicensed is illegal. Illegal gambling can, of course, be operated by both traditional and nontraditional organized crime. Thousands of dollars derived from these illegal ventures are often channeled into other illegal activities and often spur other related criminal offences.

The legalization of gambling – and I'm quoting here from the report – has not stopped the illegal activity. Organized crime has historically been involved in trafficking drugs, prostitution, loan-sharking, money laundering, and gambling. We would be very naive – and I'm quoting from the report – to expect criminal organizations to relinquish interest in gambling just because governments became involved in the business. What an excellent statement.

While there is evidence to suggest that people are more willing to tolerate legalization efforts than they were in the past, overwhelming public demand for legalization simply does not exist. Gaming activity is not being pushed by public demand. Rather, it appears that entrepreneurs and governments are predominantly the ones advancing the gaming envelope. So why is it that governments have become so attracted to the new forms of legal gambling that continue to grow? Well, the most obvious answer, Madam Speaker, is the economic benefits, the revenues that flow to the province or to the government.

There is a lot of money to be made in gambling, and we need look no further than our own province to substantiate this statement. The net return to the province of Alberta from lotteries and gambling will far exceed \$800 million this year, above the budgeted amount, and an exceptional return for a government that is not a direct operator but instead is a tax collector.

Does legalized gaming promote an increase in illegal gaming and criminal activity? That's a question raised in the report. Many experts that were spoken to said that absolutely it results in an increase.

Crime is a basic function of opportunity. Criminals go where the big dollars are. They gravitate towards money, and the more that money is fast moving, loosely controlled, and the product line offered lucrative, the more appealing it becomes. Gaming establishments, gambling establishments, and gaming activities are not an exception.

Further on in the report, Madam Speaker, after having examined the experiences in both Ontario, British Columbia, and elsewhere, some excellent recommendations were made. I will quote the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, who said: we must have the political will to put in place good public policy, stringent regulatory controls, and appropriate law enforcement measures above strictly revenue-generating considerations. How right the chairman of that committee was in making that statement.

The recommendations of the gaming task force then go on to make suggestions for some of the steps that could be taken to deal with this issue in Alberta. Obviously the gaming foothold has increased its footprint on our province over the last eight years, and that is a reality. I think what this report did and did so effectively was to say: given that there has been an increase in the gambling and the gaming opportunities over the past decade, what can we do as legislators to put a framework around that gaming initiative and make sure that the protection for our citizens and our communities and the kind of society that we want to ensure prospers in our province does?

For that reason, Madam Speaker, I want to go just quickly to some of the provisions in Bill 208. Frankly, we were surprised that the government hadn't come forward with some of the provisions that we wanted to establish in this legislation, surprised and disappointed. We were disappointed in view of the work done in the city of Calgary under the chairmanship of Mr. Jim Gray, who did some excellent work around a referendum on the lotteries and the provision of lotteries. With all those signs of unrest, signs of concern by leaders in our province that left unfettered the gambling issue could become a huge issue in our province, it was remarkable that the matter was not brought forward in legislation. In fact, we had hoped that the minister of gambling might have seen the opportunity to bring forward some of these suggestions that we are now putting forward, but in view of the fact that he didn't, we decided that we'd help him with his work and bring forward what we think is a very constructive legislative suggestion for dealing with this issue.

5:00

Actually, I must go back to the minister of gambling because he's muttering something over there. You know, one of the things that was established of course was the Gaming Research Institute, but so far we've seen nothing other than the spending of 1 and a half million dollars by the institute, certainly a far cry from the opportunity that was presented in the gaming review report for which we now propose Bill 208.

It's my intention to let the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talk in the limited time that we have available this afternoon, but just to do an overlay of some of the important features of the legislation, let me simply highlight briefly some of the provisions within this Bill 208.

*This spelling could not be verified at the time of publication.

The first one and probably the most important one is that this bill implements some of the very key recommendations of the gaming review report prepared by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler. For that reason, we are certainly looking forward to support from government MLAs for one of their own who worked so hard and did that important consultative work within our community supplemented by the Medicine Hat gaming summit, all of which came together to form this opportunity. So the first highlight is that this legislation will implement the key recommendations out of the gaming report.

Secondly, one of the most key recommendations is the establishment of a gaming secretariat to advise the minister on gaming policy. This is a very key recommendation, Madam Speaker, because of course the gaming secretariat becomes a vehicle by which the important issue of gaming and its growth and the changes in terms of gambling patterns can be addressed.

The bill also requires that all gaming supplies would be purchased by the gaming commission and be purchased by public tender, a very important issue within the whole area of organized crime.

Finally, it creates what we thought was a very excellent suggestion, and that is an all-party committee on gaming which would review the gaming act on a regular basis, which will report on the separation of the administration and the enforcement functions of the gaming commission. Of course, when the two of them exist together, there can become real questions of conflict of interest, and it's very important to separate the two provisions, administration and enforcement.

Thirdly, the all-party standing committee would review and report on funding police with lottery money to prevent and fight organized crime. We know, for example, that the policing – I apologize, Madam Speaker. I've lost my statistic on policing. Let me simply say that within the bill we believe, as was found in the example of Ontario with the gaming review, that funding the police to give them the resources that they need to ensure that organized crime, dealing with the problems that are clearly there, would be a very helpful opportunity.

MR. SMITH: How do you know they're clearly there?

MRS. MacBETH: Well, they're clearly there because of the points made obviously in the gaming review.

It's important in this review of funding that we note that given the revenue streams that are created by gambling, the current fiscal commitment to fighting organized crime and addictions associated with gambling are in fact minuscule. Gaming addictions are devastating to individuals, to families, and to communities. Any of us who have met with or know families who have been affected by gambling addictions know the toll that this addiction and all others take on a family. Given the amount of money that the government is making on the backs of gaming addicts, a proportion of that money, we believe, must be used to prevent and treat gaming addictions. Currently only \$3.6 million goes from the lottery fund to AADAC to prevent and treat gambling addictions, and that's less than one-half of 1 percent of the government's projected income from gaming of \$820 million forecast for this year.

Here's my reference that I had misplaced when I was speaking earlier. Alberta has one police officer who devotes one-fifth of his time to organized crime and gambling activities. So the combined effect of the organized crime with the impact of the gaming addictions is one that I think we as legislators ought to be very concerned about, and that's really why we've brought forward this bill.

As well, municipalities and the general public need some way to control or influence gaming activities being promoted by the

province within their boundaries. Of course, one of the very important recommendations of our bill in proposing the gaming secretariat is that a licence to grant a gaming operation the right to exist would only be considered after the municipality had put forward an approval for that to establish within their boundaries. So what we have tried to reflect is the fact that some municipalities may well decide that they do not wish to have these kinds of establishments within their borders. We believe that we should respect the views of our municipalities. It's certainly consistent with our view expressed in Bill 207 that the municipalities aren't the children of the province but rather are certainly able to make the best decisions that they can for their areas.

Finally, creating an all-party standing committee on gaming to review and report on funding gambling addictions, funding AADAC properly because we know addictions all take on the same pattern, will make an important discussion for this bill.

I look forward to the debate with members and to their support for an excellent review.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, as proposed by one of the members opposite. I would say that Bill 208 does raise some interesting points for debate, particularly with respect to the problem gambling intervention in our province. It certainly does offer some comment regarding solutions to these problems, and I have a few comments in that respect that I want to offer as well.

In my role as the Associate Minister of Health and Wellness and more particularly in my role as the minister responsible for AADAC, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, I have some specific comments from that perspective. I want to begin by saying that I'm intending to provide some information about initiatives that have taken place or are currently under way to treat, prevent, and increase everyone's understanding of problem gambling in Alberta. Therefore, I will comment on Bill 208, Madam Speaker, and in particular its call on the establishment of an Alberta gaming secretariat.

5:10

Now, there are components of the bill that involve regulatory controls on gaming which other of my colleagues will likely comment on from their perspective, but let me begin by saying that legalized gambling in Canada is a fairly recent development in our history that has only existed for about three to four decades. Within a very short time it's grown to become a major feature of our entertainment industry. In fact, Alberta has been a pioneer in Canada in introducing some new forms of gaming and in fashioning strict but workable regulatory controls that govern those same practices.

The Alberta government has also established within an equally short time an enviable track record of addressing problem gambling issues. I'd just like to cite some of those examples for the members of the House. The Alberta Lotteries and Gaming Summit, which was held in Medicine Hat in 1998, was the occasion for a healthy dialogue on gaming policy by many citizen participants. It also included 202 public submissions. One of the recommendations of that summit led to the establishment of the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, a consortium of three Alberta universities that sponsors collaborative research into gaming-related topics. The summit itself was in fact the fulfillment, at least in part, of a

recommendation of the 1995 New Directions for Lotteries and Gaming report, as Madam Speaker obviously knows because she led this particular task force. It was the product of a very wide consultation with Albertans and produced some excellent results.

Madam Speaker, actions often do speak louder than words. Therefore, concrete and effective actions have been taken, are being taken, and will continue to be taken to address problem gambling in this province. You may not hear that much about these actions, but these actions do in fact speak for themselves, especially so to those who are the recipients of Alberta's problem gambling treatment and our prevention and information services. However, the debate about Bill 208 provides an important opportunity to discuss this issue a bit further.

Much of the work undertaken in problem gambling is done by the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, an agency within the ministry of health now. AADAC's purpose is to assist Albertans in achieving freedom from the abuse of alcohol, other drugs, and gambling. AADAC positively contributes to the health of Albertans through the provision of a provincewide system of high quality and efficient addictions treatment, prevention, and information services.

I think before I proceed further, I'd like to provide just a brief background on the nature of gambling and, specifically, problem gambling here in Alberta. Here, then, are some recent statistics from research in our province. Overall gambling participation by adults in 1994 was 90 percent, while in 1998 the number had declined to 87 percent. During the same period of time the proportion of adult Albertans who were nongamblers or nonproblem gamblers increased from 94.6 percent to 95.2 percent, despite a climate that has generally seen an increase in the availability of gambling opportunities. For the large majority of adults, gambling is still a form of recreation that poses no problems. There are others for whom it does. However, the proportion of adults identified as problem gamblers, who experience some level of gambling-related harm, actually decreased from 4 percent in 1994 to 2.8 percent in 1998. The proportion of adults identified as probable pathological gamblers increased from 1.4 percent to 2 percent.

I'd like to comment also on the evolution of problem gambling programs here in Alberta. Elucidation of problem gambling issues in Alberta began to take shape back in 1993, when the provincewide research study on the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling among Albertans was conducted.

In January 1994 the government of Alberta addressed the need for problem gambling treatment and prevention by committing multi-year funding for AADAC to take a lead role in addressing the social impacts that accompany gambling. AADAC was given the responsibility, Madam Speaker, to develop and implement programs in the areas of prevention, treatment, research, and training, and this mandate obviously excludes regulatory matters. However, also in 1994 treatment and prevention capacity was developed and community programs were established.

In 1996 the focus on prevention was increased. Training resources were developed, and there was an increase in the number of treatment referrals seeking counseling assistance. In 1997-98, to bring us up to speed, there was a repeat of an earlier gambling research project to determine the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling, and more work was done on developing programs.

So what is the current situation, Madam Speaker? Well, thanks to research that has already taken place, we are gaining a much better and a much deeper understanding of problem gamblers, which is truly important for gambling programming purposes.

Now, with regard to some specific statistics let me offer the following. In 1998-99 there were about 3,100 admissions to

AADAC programs for the treatment of problem gambling, which represents 7.9 percent of total AADAC admissions for that year. However, it's also important to note that 45 percent of current problem gambling treatment admissions are for gambling alone, while 55 percent are combined with an alcohol problem or with some other drug problem.

In 1998-99 there were about 4,100 calls made to the 1-800 Gambling Help Line. This is a free 24-hour service available anywhere in the province. It provides information, crisis intervention, advice and support, and referral services for those seeking them.

We also have several education and prevention initiatives wherein much work is being done to address problem gambling. For example, physicians office posters have been distributed to about 2,500 AMA members to encourage patients to discuss gambling as it relates to their health.

We have server intervention products such as posters, business cards, matchbooks, and so on, which indicate the 1-800 Gambling Help Line number, and these are distributed to gambling venues. We also have advertisements regarding problem gambling services, and these are displayed in and are aired on a variety of locations, including the print media, television, and telephone directories. We also have community project funding which is provided to local education or prevention projects that are conceived, developed, and implemented at the community level.

The outreach by the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling is actually funded to support the delivery of problem gambling information sessions in junior and senior high schools, communities, and workplaces in the Edmonton area, and that's another important program.

An annual stakeholder meeting also takes place for various concerned groups, including AADAC, the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling, Gamblers Anonymous, the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, the gaming industry, Alberta Learning, mental health, Alberta Justice, the Alberta Hotel Association, and the Alberta Restaurant and Food Services Association. The main purpose of this meeting is to seek input on trends and on services as part of a broader planning process.

I'll conclude this portion, Madam Speaker, just by saying that a wide range of information resources have been made very publicly available, such as pamphlets, posters, classroom materials for elementary, junior, and senior high, handbooks, counseling materials, service information, displays, a newsletter, and at least one theatre project. So there is a lot going on in this area already.

Now, with specific respect to treatment initiatives there is a continuum of problem gambling treatment services available to Albertans. For example, nonresidential intensive day treatment is available where demand and numbers warrant. This program is flexible and can be adjusted to meet specific client needs. As part of this program's flexibility it can be offered as an evening or a weekend program.

5:20

We also have a crisis stabilization pilot project with residential support to stabilize affected persons from the effects of their gambling. This service is provided in Lloydminster and provides appropriate service for clients in need of immediate physical or emotional support due to the effects of their gambling.

Another important example is the enhanced inpatient treatment strategy for dually addicted persons; that is, for persons who may have both a gambling problem and an alcohol- or drug-related problem. In other words, Madam Speaker, this is a strategy for the 20 percent or so of clients with alcohol or drug problems who also report some form of gambling problem.

Three concluding examples of treatment initiatives include the

following, Madam Speaker. One, we have gambling outreach services that are offered to Edmonton's Chinese community by a counselor fluent in their language. Two, we have outpatient counseling services that are provided throughout the province by AADAC. Three, we have residential treatment programs that are available in certain locations.

Madam Speaker, another important feature that we have is training initiatives. We do this because we recognize that it is important to have knowledgeable professionals and stakeholders to provide comprehensive services. Creation of a contingent of trained professionals who are able to work effectively in problem gambling has been the goal of training programs that are provided to a wide variety of stakeholders, including gambling industry employees, casino and VLT operators, concerned members of the public, and numerous others.

Training initiatives have also included an intensive four-day addictions course, an employee assistance conference, training for casino and VLT operators, which helps them take advantage of their unique position by identifying and providing assistance to gamblers who are experiencing difficulty.

Two other important initiatives include a modular training program designed to increase community capacity to address problem gambling concerns and advanced training for those who require more in-depth knowledge and skills.

Now, in addition to all of the aforementioned, we also have numerous research initiatives. In fact, one of the recommendations that the Alberta government adopted from the Alberta Lotteries and Gaming Summit in 1998 was the following.

The provincial government should dedicate more resources to gaming research in areas like the prevention and treatment of problem gambling, the social impacts of lotteries and gaming, aboriginal gaming issues and emergent gaming activities.

Subsequently, there are a number of completed or planned additions to research our knowledge about gambling. They include the following: number one, prevalent studies among adults and adolescents; number two, problem gambling research in Alberta's aboriginal community; number three, a national scoring tool for more consistent population surveys in Canada; number four, a specific study to understand the views of youth, parents, and other people important in youths' lives; number five, research on gambling specific to and among seniors; number six, a study of family impacts that accompany problem gambling among clients in treatment; and finally, number seven, research on gambling and the workplace.

In summary, Madam Speaker, and in response to the proposed Bill 208 before us, our government continues to address the health and wellness of Albertans, including many initiatives regarding the prevention and treatment of alcohol problems, other drug problems, and, of course, gambling problems specifically.

The government of Alberta has acknowledged that legalized gaming is an important recreational activity for some and that there is also a significant economic impact and a significant employment impact in our province. However, our government also has acknowledged its responsibility to assist those who, unfortunately, for

whatever personal reasons, do experience problems with gambling. Key partners in government, the community, and the gaming industry are undertaking several actions to treat, prevent, or minimize the harms associated with problem gambling. This is done while respecting the freedom of individuals to exercise personal responsibility and choice in their entertainment choices and in their gambling activities.

Bill 208 recommends the establishment of a gaming secretariat for "research and public consultation on the social and economic effects of [problem gambling]." However, I feel our government has already established the Alberta Gaming Research Institute and the Alberta Gaming Research Council to work in this area.

The Gaming Research Institute has in fact already developed a research schedule with the involvement of three Alberta universities. The institute is governed by the Gaming Research Council, which is comprised of public and government representatives, including youth, seniors, First Nations, law enforcement, the legal profession, communities and the general public, the Canadian Foundation on Compulsive Gambling, the business community, the gaming industry, AADAC, Alberta Health and Wellness representatives, and others.

Bill 208 also proposes that a gaming secretariat would increase awareness about gambling addiction. Again, our government, as early as 1994, had already mandated to AADAC the responsibility to deal with the effects of problem gambling on families, individuals, and communities. Based on the leadership shown by the province and by AADAC, of whom I am very proud in this area, Madam Speaker, Bill 208 does appear to duplicate existing services and really does not offer anything all that new or all that different or tremendously innovative to Albertans in this regard.

So with those comments and in view of the hour I will conclude my remarks on Bill 208 and would move that we now adjourn debate on Bill 208. Thank you.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

MRS. NELSON: Yes, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move that we adjourn the House until 8 o'clock this evening, when we reconvene in committee.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion that we now adjourn until 8 p.m., when we will sit in Committee of the Whole?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: All those opposed? So ordered.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:27 p.m.]