

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 10, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/05/10

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. O Lord, guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

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

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly a very honourable individual, Mr. Peter Felix, the consul general for Switzerland. He is seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. Accompanying him is Mr. Bruno Dobler, honorary consul of Switzerland here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta and Switzerland have had a strong relationship for many years. Albertans of Swiss origin helped settle and develop our province, particularly our mountain parks. We are pleased to welcome many Swiss tourists each year. Alberta and Switzerland trade more than \$64 million worth of products in an average year in areas ranging from raw materials to high-tech products. The visit is an excellent opportunity for us to build on this relationship by exploring new areas of co-operation and growth. I had the honour of hosting His Honour the consul general.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to present a petition from 679 Albertans from Calgary, Fort McMurray, Sherwood Park, Bon Accord, Tofield, Fort Saskatchewan, Mundare, Beaumont, Devon, and Edmonton urging this government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining [the] public health care [system]." With the petitions tabled today, we will be at 73,000 petitions opposed to this government's privatization plans.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have petitions to table on behalf of 566 Albertans from all over. They are from Stony Plain, Gainford, Spruce Grove, Mayerthorpe, Winterburn, Seba Beach, Sherwood Park, Ryley, Edmonton, Whitecourt, Ardrossan, Carvel, Beaumont, Wetaskiwin, Morinville, Tofield, Leduc, and Alberta Beach. They are all requesting that this government "stop promoting private health care."

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition today calling on the Legislature to introduce legislation which will require two people to be on duty in businesses after hours, after dark.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition signed by 766 Albertans from Sherwood Park, Edmonton, Killam, Calgary, Onoway, Spruce Grove, Gunn, and St. Albert, all in opposition to a two-tier health care system.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three petitions to table today. The first one is signed by 647 Albertans from Edmonton, Morinville, St. Albert, Calgary, Sherwood Park, Red Deer, Vegreville, Spruce Grove, Cold Lake, Sylvan Lake, Rimbey, Bonnyville, High Prairie, Didsbury, Beaumont, Bon Accord, and Ponoka. They are calling on this Assembly to urge the government to

stop promoting private for-profit health care, within the domain of medically required services, and to ban any existing for-profit operations that are conducting medically required surgical services, as paid for by the Government . . . through any Regional Health Authority.

The second one is signed by 58 Albertans from Athabasca and surrounding areas. This petition reads as follows, Mr. Speaker.

Whereas, a properly funded, public health care system is the most cost-effective way to deliver quality health services

And whereas, public health care is vital to ensure quality [health] care for all Albertans

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 the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

The third one, Mr. Speaker, is signed by 319 Albertans opposed to Bill 11. They are from Calais, Valleyview, Red Deer, Grimshaw, Berwyn, Gibbons, Fort Saskatchewan, Spruce Grove, Camrose, Canyon Creek, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Duffield, Fort Saskatchewan, Fort McMurray, Morinville, Little Smoky, Sturgeon Lake, Crooked Creek, Fox Creek, Sunset House, DeBolt, and Peace River. This brings the total number of signatures on this petition to 22,244.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to present a petition signed by 45 individuals very concerned about mature women's health. A lot of them are from Brooks, Rolling Hills, and Tilley, Alberta. They're urging the Legislative Assembly to urge the government "to take an enlightened preventative approach" with newer and more effective medications and therapies around osteoporosis.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two petitions to present to the Assembly today. The first is on behalf of a number of Calgarians. These individuals are asking the Assembly "to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

The second petition I have for the Assembly today is from 603 individuals from Vermilion, Marwayne, Bonnyville, Dewberry, Mannville, Wembley, Water Valley, Calgary, Flatbush, Cold Lake, Fort McMurray, Clandonald, Innisfree, Wainwright, and Elk Point. Mr. Speaker, this petition reads:

We, the undersigned citizens of Alberta, strongly oppose the privatization of health care services in Alberta. We do not wish to see for-profit services used in our health care because we believe that this will lead to a two-tier system. We call for funding to be restored by the Provincial Government to public health care to reduce the current long waiting lists.

Thank you.

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

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

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.

It is signed by a number of residents from Sherwood Park, Wildwood, and the city.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this time I would ask that the petition I presented on Tuesday, May 9, signed by 172 Albertans requesting that the erosion of . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, it's only required to ask for the petition be read. The Clerk will do the work.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. I am asking that that petition 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 Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I request that the petition I presented on May 9 regarding 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 healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

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 concerns about 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 healthcare and undermining public healthcare.

1:40

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. I'd ask that the petition I read into the record yesterday 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-Manning.

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd ask that the petition I put in yesterday with respect to public health care 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-Norwood.

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, wish that the petition I presented yesterday signed by 146 Albertans requesting that private 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 to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly on Tuesday, May 9 regarding the divisive and disruptive labour dispute at the *Calgary Herald* be now read and received.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, petition the [Legislative] assembly to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the *Calgary Herald*.

THE SPEAKER: Do you have a second, hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar?

MR. MacDONALD: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented to the Legislative Assembly yesterday 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 protect, support, and enhance public health care in Alberta and to ban for-profit, private hospitals from receiving public dollars.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday, May 9, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned, call upon the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta:

1. To immediately disallow any further development of the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country, including those proposals currently under consideration;

2. To maintain Kananaskis Country in natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational activities;
3. To create a Wildland Provincial Park which protects the whole of the undeveloped parts of the Kananaskis and Spray Valleys.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the petition I tabled yesterday 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: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, request that the petition I tabled yesterday 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. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name concerning public health care now be 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, sir. I'd ask that the petition I had introduced yesterday, May 9, with respect to 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 of Alberta 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 standing in my name on the Order Paper asking the government "to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care," which combined with the third party and ourselves brings the petitioners to 100,000 in this province . . .

THE SPEAKER: Please. Please have a chair. Clerk, do we have such a petition?

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 Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the petition I presented yesterday on front licence plates be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to re-instate the front license plate on all vehicles registered in Alberta.

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to table with the Assembly five copies of a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Journal*. The letter was written by John Zaozirny, who is the former minister of energy, expressing his disappointment and puzzlement at some of the opposition to Bill 11, particularly the opposition of two former colleagues, Mr. Amerongen and Mr. King.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish first of all to table with the Assembly the annual report of the Alberta College of Optometrists for the year ended December 31, 1999. Five copies are provided.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of the complete executive summary of the pilot study Evaluation of Contracted Surgical Services completed November 12, 1998. It's from the Calgary regional health authority.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to explain that I realize this was purportedly tabled by the opposition earlier, but they somehow missed out a number of pages, and I wanted to table the entire report, including the conclusion.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today a copy of a letter I received from a scholar in our city, Dr. Brigham Card. He identifies the Cardston medical contract in 1932 as actually the beginning of Canadian medicare.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would to table the required copies of the annual report of the Edmonton Community Lottery Board for 1999. This document provides a complete listing of all the grant recipients' proof for funding. My sincere thanks go for a job well done to the board members.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you. Only two tablings this afternoon, sir, both are opinion poll summaries. The first one is the summary for the month of April 2000 at www.garydickson.ab.ca. There were 2,251 hits, 90 percent opposed to Bill 11.

The second one is 567 hits from May 1 to May 9 at the same web site, 86 percent opposed to the overnight-stay provision in the 14 government amendments.

Thank you.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table five copies of a petition. The reason I didn't present this during petitions is that these petitioners faxed in their petitions instead of providing the originals. It is a petition in support of public health care in Alberta. It is signed by 677 residents of Alberta from Cochrane,

Anzac, Clearwater, Fort Macleod, Pincher Creek, Edmonton, Calgary, Drumheller, Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray, Calmar, Morinville, Vegreville, Drayton Valley, Hinton, Lamont, Fort Saskatchewan, and Fairview. These undersigned citizens "petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care" in the province of Alberta.

Thank you very much.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a petition I received from third-year nursing students at the University of Calgary who are adamantly opposed to Bill 11. They include Maureen Firmston, Kim Gibb, Suzanne Champoux, Lisa McClelland, Lindsay Bauer, Agnes Antivolla, and Jen Langille. They've asked me to table it in the Assembly, which I am pleased to do on their behalf.

Secondly, I would like to table a petition signed by 160 seniors who are part of the Federal Superannuates National Association who have signed a petition which I'm pleased to table opposing Bill 11 and who were even more concerned after their detailed study of the legislation.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure today to table a set of letters. These letters are signed by 146 Albertans from Red Deer requesting in a different set of ways and in a number of different examples that they give that the government not promote private, for-profit health care.

1:50

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a petition which indicates opposition to Bill 11 and states that it "will have far reaching, destructive consequences for all of us."

The second is a FOIP request to the office of the Premier asking that the total numbers of the correspondence both in support of and against Bill 11 be provided.

The third tabling is the preliminary report of results of a questionnaire in Edmonton-Meadowlark, both the percentage and numeric breakdown, which indicated overwhelming opposition to private, for-profit health care.

Thank you.

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

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is from a constituent of mine, Cecile Hansen, very much opposed to Bill 11.

The other is an article entitled U.S. Doctor Wails over Managed Care, that was sent to me by Mary-ellen Robinson. She states: "In the name of democracy and common sense I beg you to vote against Bill 11 . . . I pray that you will have the strength to vote against Bill 11."

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a total of four

tablings today. The first three are letters opposing Bill 11. The first letter is from Harold and Cheri Gerbrandt of Medicine Hat. The second is from Richard Beech of Sherwood Park. The third one is from Shirley Thomas of Red Deer.

Mr. Speaker, the fourth tabling is in the form of a petition. I couldn't table it because it doesn't have the disclaimer. I would like to table requisite copies of this petition and, with your permission, read the petition into the record. "We the undersigned citizens of Alberta petition the . . ."

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, if it's inappropriate for the Routine, there's no way of getting around it, so please table it, and let's move on.

DR. PANNU: Okay, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

This petition was circulated by the Sisters of Assumption and is signed by 235 Franco-Albertans opposed to the privatization of health care in Alberta. The petition is signed by residents of Plamondon, Lac La Biche, Grassland, St. Lina, and Boyle.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I'd table five copies of a photocopied petition from Edmonton, St. Albert, and Stony Plain signed by 30 citizens opposed to Bill 11.

The second tabling is a petition from 37 citizens in Gleichen and Wheatland county that lacks the privacy regulation and asks for the withdrawal of Bill 11.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a copy of a petition signed by 565 people from Bonnyville, Glendon, Ardmore, Frog Lake, Mallaig, Cold Lake, and La Corey opposed to Bill 11 and a two-tiered health care system.

I also have a second tabling. It is an article on the front page of the *Western Catholic Reporter* entitled Scrap Bill 11, says the Catholic Women's League.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is 35 letters to the Premier from residents of Canmore who are opposed to the Genesis proposal for the Spray Valley in Kananaskis Country.

The second is 47 more letters, Mr. Speaker, from people from southern Alberta, including Canmore, to the Premier urging him to scrap the development in Kananaskis Country and protect "this wonderful area as a designated Wildland Park."

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have but one tabling today. It is from 150 Albertans from Red Deer, Alberta. They wish to register their opposition to "plans for privatization and for-profit hospitals in Alberta." They further say that they "cannot see how creating a for-profit health [care] system can benefit the taxpayers and voters of Alberta."

Thank you, sir.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition that was not in the proper form signed by 83 residents of Fort Macleod requesting “no special private clinic or special services” in public health care.

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

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today a notice to all members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts regarding the second meeting cancellation from the Minister of Learning and our lack of ability now to hold his department accountable.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have one tabling this afternoon, and that is a letter I've received from the Premier of Saskatchewan, Roy Romanow, regarding the shortage of health professionals not only in this province but across the country. Thank you.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 23 special guests from the northernmost part of the Little Bow constituency in Arrowwood school. Accompanying 18 students that have had a full two days visiting the science centre and the Provincial Museum yesterday as well as the Legislature here today are their teacher, Mrs. Rani Crawford, and their bus driver and teacher, Mr. Dean Truman, along with parent helpers Mrs. Darcy Oberholtzer, Mrs. Peggy Robinson, and Mrs. Linda Garside. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Resource Development.

DR. WEST: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly some students from the Marwayne Jubilee school. Marwayne is about 150 miles from here in the northeast. These are very intelligent students, great self-discipline. They were in my office earlier. They've been to the Space and Science Centre. They're going to have a tour here, and they're also going to get to go swimming in the city of Edmonton today, and then they're going back home. I would like to introduce with them Mr. Elgin Pawlak, teacher, and Mrs. Arlene Parker, teacher assistant. They're in the members' gallery. I would ask them to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the group from Rocky Mountain House is in the House yet, but I want to introduce the group to you. They will be coming in very shortly. There are 15 grade 10 students along with three teachers and two parents. I'd ask that the House give them the usual warm welcome.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very

pleased today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 13 students and their instructor from the continuing education annex. Their instructor, Ms Nancy Fanjoy, is accompanying them. I didn't get a chance to meet them earlier, but I ask members of the Assembly to please welcome them and give them the usual warm round of applause.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you today on behalf of the Member for Red Deer-North 52 grade 10 students from Lindsay Thurber high school in Red Deer.

I want to note, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations went to Lindsay Thurber high school, as did the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. It's very likely that the Minister of Gaming, because he grew up in Red Deer, went to Lindsay Thurber. The minister of agriculture went to Lindsay Thurber, and the cousins of the minister from Calgary all went to Lindsay Thurber high school, and while the Minister of Learning went to Red Deer College and should've gone to Lindsay Thurber, he didn't. It's obviously an outstanding high school. It has a great impact on our province, and who knows what's going to come from this group of grade 10 students in the future.

I would ask them to rise, along with their teachers, Mr. Carl Malenfant and Mr. Rick Ramsfield, and receive the warm greetings of this Assembly.

2:00

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions to make today. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Alison Cameron, who will be my summer student this year – she has just completed her first year of nursing at the University of Alberta – and Heather Kuhl, who is a Grade 10 student doing a work experience project in my office. I would ask these two to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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. We're down to the eleventh hour and debate has been closed off, but a majority of Albertans are hoping that it's not too late for the Premier to take the whips off of his caucus and let his MLAs represent the wishes of their constituents on private health care. My question is: will the Premier finally change his mind and allow his MLAs a free vote on private health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have explained so many times in this Legislature that my caucus colleagues have the opportunity to vote freely on this particular matter. It was a caucus decision not directed by me – I purposely missed that caucus meeting – a caucus decision to unanimously support the government's position on Bill 11.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, if Bill 11 causes no harm and if it isn't going to be a threat to public health care in this province, why is this Premier so afraid to allow the free vote to occur?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm not afraid to have a free vote on this particular matter. There was a free vote in the caucus.

I know that it's very difficult for the leader of the Liberal

opposition to understand a vote in caucus because when I was in caucus with her, Mr. Speaker, there wasn't such a thing as a vote. So I can understand why it's difficult for her to understand that we actually do have votes in our caucus. It was unheard of when she was a senior member of the caucus in the Getty government. They simply did not have votes.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, this is not a comment on free votes; it's a comment on freedom of speech. The chair will recognize the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition to raise a question, and there should be a minimal amount of interjections or none. The chair will then recognize a representative of the government to respond, and there will be minimal or few interjections, if any at all. That's called freedom of speech.

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Voting on Bill 11 (continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, if the Premier can sign a membership pledge to support his former Treasurer in a leadership bid, why won't he sign a pledge for a free vote for Albertans on health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'll explain again. There was a vote in the caucus, and it was a free vote. I wasn't there, but I'm sure that as many members of caucus as wanted to speak on this issue said their piece. At the end of the day, as I understand from the whip, the vote in caucus, something that is so foreign to the leader of the Liberal opposition, was unanimous to support the government's position.

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

Health Diagnostic Equipment

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Fairview hospital X-ray machine is 14 years old. Patients and staff of the Mistahia region are very concerned about receiving higher than recommended doses of radiation, as they should be. The faulty X-ray machine can emit radiation levels as high as 19 rad, almost double the provincially set standard of 10 rad. My questions are to the Premier. Will the Premier commit right now to the people of Mistahia and Alberta to provide regional health authorities with adequate budgets to buy and operate diagnostic equipment that is safe?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, indeed, that is in our six-point health plan, to make sure that we have all of our facilities equipped with up-to-date equipment.

Relative to the situation as it pertains specifically to the hospital in Fairview, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if the information with respect to the possibility of radiation coming from an X-ray machine is valid, I would certainly expect that those in charge at the hospital would refer that to officials in the regional health authority and that that machine would not be used, period. That is what we would expect of any health authority in this province and those within it in terms of not endangering patient safety.

The other point, though, Mr. Speaker, is that we have in the budget that was tabled before this Legislature and approved

significant additional dollars for capital equipment. We also added capital equipment in last year's budget, and the Mistahia regional health authority got their fair proportion. I assume that they would manage those resources and deal with this situation.

THE SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, they've been turned down for capital funding.

My second question is to the Premier. Is the Premier's underfunding of health authorities for modern diagnostic equipment part of his plan to artificially create a demand for private diagnostic services for Albertans?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, obviously the Liberal opposition has not been paying attention. Just recently the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness announced the purchase of four new MRIs to go into hospitals, conventional hospitals, as we know them today. That's in addition to the MRIs that have already been slated for Lethbridge, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, and the Mistahia region in Grande Prairie.

The statement that the leader of the Liberal opposition made relative to there being no capital funding I don't think is a true statement. I'm sure the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness would be very happy to provide the leader of the Liberal opposition with the actual amounts that have been provided to the Mistahia health region for the purchase of capital equipment.

MR. JONSON: If I could just briefly supplement, Mr. Speaker, just possibly the questioner is not portraying this in the right way. There well may be a proposal for renovation in the capital project at the Fairview hospital which has not made its way up the priority list, but if they're honestly talking about an X-ray machine, we have additional capital dollars in the health care budget for the regional health authorities to set their priorities and purchase the needed equipment.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My third question is to the Premier. How can this Premier afford a \$3 million communications campaign on private health care, yet he doesn't have the \$400,000 the people of the Mistahia health care region need for a safe X-ray machine?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, not one single cent has been spent on a campaign to promote private health care. Yes, some money has been spent to explain to the public our intentions relative to a piece of legislation to protect the public health care system as we know it today and to abide by the principles of the Canada Health Act, something, by the way, that the Liberals voted against.

Relative to the situation in Fairview with respect to the X-ray machine, if there is an unsafe X-ray machine, then we will look after it. We'll look after it this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the question: when did this leader of the Liberal opposition learn about this particular situation? Has she been keeping it under her hat, so to speak? Has she been keeping it under her hat? You know, why can't she act like Sheldon Chumir, who was an honourable person, or like Bettie Hewes, who is an honourable person? When they found out something that might cause danger to life, they would have the decency and the courtesy to go to the minister.

2:10

So their objective is to try to embarrass the government. They have no concern whatsoever over public safety. None whatsoever.

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

Private Health Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the debate on private health care policy the Premier has ignored the voices and the concerns of Albertans. He's ignored their phone calls, their letters, their 100,000 petitions signed, their faxes, their e-mails. He's refused to answer the many Albertans who've gathered at the Legislature over the last few weeks. In fact, the Premier has left a trail of unanswered questions, and it is time to get some straight, truthful answers. My question is to the Premier. Where is the evidence to show that your health care policy won't be more expensive?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that's what the policy is all about. For the first time surgical clinics will have to demonstrate to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, to the regional health authorities, to the minister that efficiencies will result, that there will be cost savings, and that it will reduce waiting lists. And they voted against that.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, where is the evidence – evidence – that the health care policy isn't going to increase waiting lists?

MR. KLEIN: Well, maybe, Mr. Speaker, the evidence is contained in documents that have been hidden away for 15 years in the 150 boxes of documents that the leader of the Liberal opposition refuses to make available for the public. Maybe the evidence is contained there. We will never know.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, where is the evidence to show that the new health professionals being trained at public expense won't end up in private health care?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again, this is something that will have to be determined between the RHA, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and the minister. This legislation, the policy, is to enhance the protection of the public system as we know it today and to fully commit ourselves to the principles of the Canada Health Act.

What is happening right now? You know, the strange thing and I guess maybe the thing that's not totally honest about this on the part of the Liberal Party is that they're trying to create the impression that this is something new. Perhaps contained in those 150 boxes that have been secreted away is the information relative to the 30 clinics that the leader of the Liberal opposition allowed to be established and allowed to charge facility fees.

Surgical clinics are not new. They have been operating in this province for years and years. This leader of the Liberal opposition knows it because she allowed 30 of them to operate and charge facility fees. So it's not being honest to somehow imply that this is something new. This has been going on in this province for years.

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

Charles Camsell Hospital

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The likely passage of Bill 11 this evening is the latest example of a government hell-bent on privatizing what's left of Alberta's public health care system. Whether it's hospital services, laboratory services, home care services, or long-term care services, this is a government that places a higher priority on the well-being of corporations than on the well-being of citizens. My questions are to the Premier. Which private,

for-profit health care interests does the government hope to reward by selling the Charles Camsell hospital in Edmonton?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm really not familiar with the details of a sale if indeed it is pending. I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, if I understand the hon. member's question, he's talking about the sale of a hospital. I would like to have that elaborated on. I'm not aware of the sale of any operating hospital.

DR. PANNU: My second question, Mr. Speaker, to the Premier: given the severe shortage of long-term care beds, why doesn't the government donate the Charles Camsell site to the publicly owned Capital Care Group instead of selling it to private hospitals or nursing home corporations?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is really a decision that would have to be made by the RHA in consultation with the minister and certainly whatever committees or authorities have been established within the Capital regional health authority to address long-term care needs.

Relative to the specific question, perhaps the minister can answer.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is helpful that the member has now finally identified the building. The Charles Camsell hospital was reduced in terms of its function some years ago, going back into, as I recall, the late '80s. It was eventually phased out and closed down because of the changing role of the hospital. It was, as I recall, operated in a contract relationship with the federal government for our First Nations people for a period of time, and then the service for those individuals was shifted and integrated more with the overall public health care system.

Mr. Speaker, I've not been in the building recently, but I have been through it, and it would require major, major renovations. I don't think that a long-term care proponent would necessarily regard it as a very great gift unless it was supplemented with quite a bit of additional capital money to bring it up to standard and to renovate it.

I'm sure those options are being considered by the capital health authority, but those are some of the background items that would have to be considered.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Minister of Health and Wellness: what evidence, if any, does the government have that justifies its clear bias towards subsidizing the private, for-profit sector to build and operate long-term care beds as opposed to having those beds built and operated by regional health authorities directly?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've had for decades in this province, as I've said many times – but let's talk particularly about the long-term care area – a mixture of voluntary, private, and directly publicly run and built long-term care centres. We have, yes, as we did with the lodges across this province, provided a financing program whereby the private sector can get involved in building a long-term care centre and operating it just as a volunteer organization such as the Bethany Group can get involved in conducting or completing a capital project and having an operating contract. They've worked well across this province and provided good service, and that is what we're continuing to do.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Grain Transportation

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Transportation of grain to market for Alberta farmers has been very inefficient and has cost Alberta farmers millions of dollars more than it should. The Premier, the minister, and the Minister of Infrastructure have lobbied the federal government for changes. Today we hear of proposed legislation by the federal government to correct this. Can the minister outline the fundamental components of today's announcement and what it will mean for Alberta grain farmers?

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

MR. LUND: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for your guidance. I'll try to compress it as much as possible, but this is a major announcement for Alberta and particularly for Alberta farmers.

2:20

First of all, let me say that we didn't get everything we wanted, but it did move a long way toward implementing the Estey report and the recommendations that Arthur Kroeger made. The number one benefit to Alberta farmers that we will realize starting on August 1 of the new crop year is the revenue cap on the railways. There's going to be a cap established that is about \$178 million less than the revenue would be on the movement of 30 million tonnes. That is a reduction of about 18 percent from where it would have been.

Now, we've got to be careful with the math, because the fact is that if you add in first that 4.5 percent increase that was announced some weeks ago, now it's being reduced by 18 percent. So really the true reduction from this current year's freight rates is about 13.5 percent, which means about \$4.47 a tonne reduction. So with the amount of grain that is moving out of the province of Alberta, that will mean a direct reduction of about \$45 million to \$50 million that will stay in the pockets of Alberta farmers. It's important to recognize that this is an annual thing, and it's not tax dollars. Those are farmers' dollars, so it'll stay in their pockets.

The next component that is pretty important to mention is the fact that there's also the injection of \$175 million of new money that will go to infrastructure where we have rail abandonment. Then there are some four or five other points, but we'll deal with those some other time.

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

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you. My supplementary to the minister. Mr. Minister, I appreciate what you just told us, but given that Alberta has called for moving the role of the Canadian Wheat Board to spout and this has not been fully implemented, does the government support the proposed legislation?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, yes, we did recommend that in fact the Wheat Board be moved to spout, but actually Kroeger had recommended that port would be good enough. We accept this. It's a move in the right direction.

I think that probably a couple of the other points that are even more important to Alberta than whether spout or terminal is the fact that the federal government has also committed to looking at the rail

situation, the transportation situation, and by law they have to do a review under the Canadian Transportation Agency of the whole rail system starting July 1, 2000.

The minister has committed that in the first six months of that review he wants an answer back on things like open rail, tariffs, and that sort of thing. That could be extremely important to Alberta farmers, particularly in light of the one other component that they announced today, and that is that they will be accepting the 25 percent contract for movement to the terminals from the prairies.

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

MR. TRYNCHY: Thank you. That's a step in the right direction, Mr. Minister, but what effects will all these changes have on Alberta's domestic food processing and agricultural value-added industries? Will the funds flow through to Albertans?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, of course, ultimately we believe and it's the position of the Alberta government that we need to move the Canadian Wheat Board out of the domestic market. Until that happens, we still are going to have a problem with some of the added value in the province, because there's an additional administrative cost that adds absolutely no value to the primary producers.

So that would be one of the things that we would be still hoping for, but I have to reiterate again that this is a step in the right direction. Certainly if the Canadian Wheat Board lives up to the rhetoric that they are producing today, then this will be an even better first step.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's return to the unanswered questions on private health care. Why does the Premier continue to allow queue-jumping with private MRIs in Alberta?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to MRIs, which are not under the jurisdiction of the Canada Health Act, if a perfectly healthy individual simply wants to have an examination, yes, that individual, as I understand it, can go to an MRI clinic and pay to have the procedure. But if a doctor suspects that there is something wrong with the individual and prescribes an MRI, then it is done under the publicly funded system.

I stand to be corrected, and I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, for a number of years, going back to the time of the Leader of the Opposition as minister, it has been possible for a person to pay for certain diagnostic services outside medical health care coverage because they did not require the services of a physician for the actual conducting of the test. That, yes, is happening today.

MRS. MacBETH: Point of order.

MR. JONSON: However, the government has been increasing in a major, major way the MRI capacity in this province. This is for machines that will operate within the public health care system for which there will be coverage, which will reduce waiting lists and will bring Alberta to a top ranking in this country in terms of the number of scans per thousand population.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, why does the Premier continue to hide public contracts for laboratory and diagnostic services in this province?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, those contracts, as I understand it, are between the regional health authorities and the various diagnostic clinics.

Relative to the transparency and the openness of contracts as they relate to contracted surgeons, Mr. Speaker, that issue was addressed in Bill 11 as one of the amendments to strengthen the old provision of openness and transparency, but the Liberals voted against it.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this Premier refuses to answer the legitimate questions that Albertans have posed, it confirms that by his actions this Premier has broken trust with the people of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: I was waiting for the question. It didn't come.

MR. JONSON: I can respond, Mr. Speaker. In terms of the openness of contracts, this is something that we need to be able to ensure will occur, and we need the legislation, Bill 11, to do it.

But I would like to point out that while the increased capacity is being put in place in Calgary, certain contracts have been made with private providers of MRI services. Some of the proponents of those contracts are well known to members of the opposition. The point here is that even though the legislation is not yet in place, I understand from the Calgary regional health authority that they are going to be publishing the details of the overall contracts for these three short-term times of service on the web site that they operate.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that with the goodwill there we're already moving in the direction of Bill 11.

Driver Licensing

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Infrastructure, who is also responsible for traffic safety. It's been about five or six years since this Legislature started discussing seriously graduated licensing. My first question to the minister is: what are the elements of the currently proposed graduated licensing program?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is right. The graduated licensing program falls under the Traffic Safety Act, which was passed in the House last year. Before I talk about the elements of the graduated licensing program, I would just like to say that the graduated licence is a process that is intended to give drivers adequate on-road experience within certain conditions in a very controlled environment.

2:30

We are in the process now of beginning a round of public consultations with respect to the proposed program, and the discussion paper we are intending to send out to all Albertans and all of the stakeholders will be centred on a number of points. One of them will be a one-year learner period and a two-year probationary period for new drivers so they can get supervised experience in all season driving conditions, then a ban on new drivers operating a

vehicle between midnight and 5 a.m. – now, this is just for the learner period, the one year – and also the number of passengers in the vehicle not exceeding the number of seat belts.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister would tell us what the implications will be with respect to beginning drivers, learning drivers when it comes to mixing alcohol and driving.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there will be zero tolerance, of course, for alcohol use while driving. This applies both to the learner and also to the adult that's with the learner in the car. Action will be taken against the driver, and it's important to accentuate again that it's not only the person in the learner status but also the driver that's there to advise the learner in terms of conditions and rules of the road. So both. If there's evidence of alcohol detected on either one, then we'll pursue it under the current law.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, in some of the current newspaper articles the question that comes to mind is: under what circumstances might a second test be required with respect to earning your driver's licence?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the graduated licence program will apply to all new drivers regardless of their age or where they come from. Anyone moving to Alberta from another country who has held a licence for less than two years will have to go through a graduated licence program to make sure that they know Alberta's rules of the road and especially have an opportunity to drive during all the seasons, and of course winter is most important. Our conditions are very different, as you know, from many parts of the world.

Now, experienced drivers from other countries may be asked to take a road test and a written test to ensure that they are familiar with Alberta's roads and conditions with the exception of those countries with which Alberta has reciprocal agreements. Germany, Japan, and Australia come to mind.

Mr. Speaker, this is all in the discussion document. It will go to all Albertans for their input.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, followed by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Institute for Health Economics Report

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Will the minister confirm that the final draft of the government-funded report from the Institute of Health Economics is now complete?

MR. JONSON: I cannot confirm that at this moment, Mr. Speaker, but we are expecting it in short order.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, would it be possible that that could be released before we have to vote on Bill 11 tonight?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, as was indicated earlier in terms of the preliminary findings of the institute, that report will be, I think, very similar to the one that was just tabled today on behalf of the Calgary regional health authority. It will point out certain advantages, certain examples which are very cost-effective and very acceptable in the private sector as well as those that are much stronger on the public side.

The point here is that – and it relates to Bill 11. One of the messages that I think will come out of that report in its conclusions

is that there needs to be a thorough analysis of any particular proposal for the operation of a surgical clinic, Mr. Speaker, and that certain criteria have to be met. That's what Bill 11 is all about.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, it still would help if we could get to see it before we have the vote tonight.

Is there something in this report that's not going to support Bill 11?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, my reports and indications are no. In fact, it would be judged to be on the positive side as far as our case for Bill 11 is concerned.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Natural Gas Pricing

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've received inquiries from several constituents about the variation in the price of natural gas. Sometimes the price that one household pays for natural gas varies by as much as 25 percent from the price that a neighbouring household pays even when the usage is basically the same if they are on a different utility system. Can the Minister of Resource Development tell the Assembly how the natural gas price varies across the province?

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, the issue that the member has brought forward is often related to me from various areas of the province. We have 69 gas co-ops that deliver gas, some 24 municipally owned gas companies, and of course we have the five investor-owned gas companies in the province. So there is a great variance, and it's because of three or four different factors.

One of the main factors, of course, is that we have a fixed gas charge, a fixed delivery charge, a variable delivery charge, and sometimes a municipal fee. Now, these prices vary by utility, each one of these different ones, and they're all outlined on the bill. For example, the fixed delivery charges of the three biggest investor-owned utilities are similar, about \$14 per month for ATCO south and AltaGas Utilities and \$13.80 for ATCO north. There is a spread in the variable delivery charges. They range from \$1.05 a gigajoule to \$1.19 to \$1.29 depending on which utility area you're in. There's also the variation and the cost of the natural gas. That varies from \$3.33 per gigajoule at ATCO south to \$4.26 at ATCO north and \$4.34 at AltaGas.

Now, the other thing is that if you're sitting beside a rural gas co-op, they buy all of their gas, the 69 of them, through a thing called Gas Alberta. They bulk-buy the gas, and then they blend these with the operating costs as the cost of gas. So you can get rates varying from \$2.75 in the Gem Gas Co-op to \$4.73 in the Lobstick Gas Co-op, and it goes on and on.

So there is no way that a brother-in-law can compare from one district to another and come up with the same price.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can the minister tell the Assembly why the prices vary so much?

DR. WEST: Well, what I explained the first time I got up was how the costs were made up. Now let's look at what varies some of these costs from one area to another. Let's look at some of the gas distribution costs. The age of the system of the older gas distributors

costs less because they're more depreciated, and the newer systems cost more. Customer density: you can well imagine that in the city of Edmonton or in the city of Calgary the distances between customers and the density makes it cheaper to deliver those costs. There's cross-subsidization. In some utilities urban consumers subsidize deliveries in less populated areas, so you get variance that way. Then there's municipal franchise taxes. Some municipalities put on a franchise tax, and it's right on the bill.

The other cost variance relates to the gas itself. Remember that on gas contracts the price of gas can vary depending on when they've been signed and for how long. If some utilities have gas storage and are competing against somebody that has no storage, of course they can buy cheaper gas and hold it for six months, and it's reflected on their bill. Some of the companies also produce the gas, and of course they may have storage capacity and produce the gas and don't have to buy it off the spot market, and therefore it's cheaper.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

MR. SEVERTSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These reasons for variance don't explain why the price of natural gas has increased across the board over the last year. Could the Minister of Resource Development explain why the prices have gone up?

DR. WEST: I know that the hon. member wants to ask this on behalf of his constituents, because we're all concerned here. The price of natural gas is going up. It's market driven. There is no disconnect now between pipeline capacity and the United States. When we had more gas than we had pipeline capacity, of course there was cheaper gas back in Alberta. Now with the Alliance pipeline and some of the new pipelines that have been built transborder, we are going to see a North American marketplace, and because of the uptake of natural gas in electrical generation and the conversion from oil in certain industries to gas utilization, we'll see the price go up.

2:40

One thing you should note is that Alberta still has the cheapest gas prices. Remember you pay the cost of gas. Let's look at April 24: in Canadian dollars Calgary was \$3.96 a gigajoule; Vancouver, \$3.88; Toronto, \$4.56; Chicago, \$4.45. Some say that they pay less for gas in the States because we're exporting. They pay more for gas in the United States.

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

Health Care Funding

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Rockyview hospital in Calgary has one CAT scan that handles 50 procedures a day when it was only meant to handle 20. Quite basically, they just need more equipment. Even Bud McCaig, chairman of the Calgary Health Trust, has said that the private sector is going to have to shoulder a heavier load when it comes to health care expenditures. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the government doing to ensure that all regions have a sustainable plan for providing equipment renewal? Or are they just going to be forced to rely on bottle drives next?

MR. JONSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, a very significant additional amount of money is being provided for capital equipment across this province. It is recognized that the CAT scan, of course, is a very important diagnostic tool, and I'm sure that the Calgary health authority would give priority to diagnostic equipment

which needs to be either replaced or added to in terms of capacity.

Mr. Speaker, we also have a special fund particularly for specialized, high-tech equipment that is allocated to health authorities out of our lottery fund, and our overall contributions, as I've said, to capital funding have been increasing rather significantly.

If I could, just for more details on it I would ask the Minister of Infrastructure to perhaps comment further on this.

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the plan over the next three years is to continue consulting with regional health authorities in looking at those areas, not only replacing equipment that requires replacement because it's old and has served it usefulness but also in adapting new technologies.

A good example, Mr. Speaker, is of course the newly opened neonatal unit over at the Royal Alex with the digital transmission of all the diagnostic imaging. The specialists now at the Royal Alex can consult with specialists anywhere around the world, with those physicians that are on the same system that we have here in Edmonton. I would say that it is the first in Alberta, right here in Edmonton, to go on an electronic transmission system and, in fact, probably the first of its kind in Canada.

MS LEIBOVICI: As it now appears to be government policy that the private sector begin to shoulder a heavier load when it comes to health care expenditures, is the minister prepared to admit that the quality of health care delivery provided in the community is going to depend on its ability to fund-raise?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is well demonstrated in our budget and in our overall business plan that this government is committed to adding significantly today and in the future, some 21 percent more money over the next three years, rising to well over \$5 billion, comparing well with the expenditures of other provinces. So we're certainly investing in the public health care system of this province.

Mr. Speaker, the other point is that we are very grateful that there are health care foundations, people that want to add to and enhance the capability of our health care system. Those types of organizations have thankfully been there for decades. There's nothing new about this. They've bought equipment; they've bought furniture. They've enhanced the overall situation as far as conditions in hospitals and have done so for years.

MS LEIBOVICI: They're now funding essential services.

Is the underfunding of the Rockyview just another example of this government's attempt to create a demand for private facilities in this province?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to visit the Rockyview hospital twice in the fairly recent past, and it's my impression that it is a very, very busy hospital, running to capacity. I would certainly judge that to be the case. I visited with physicians. They're doing a tremendous amount of good work there. I've not had it drawn to my attention that the Rockyview hospital regards itself as being unfairly treated with respect to the overall Calgary regional health authority budget, although, yes, they would like to have an MRI, and that is, I guess, under consideration right now.

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

Property Taxes

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent called my office

raising a concern about our government refund policy on overassessment of property value. My constituent informed me that the story in the *Calgary Herald* indicates that our government has instituted a new policy that would cost Calgary property owners millions of dollars per year. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Why is the government instituting a new assessment refund policy that penalizes Calgary property owners?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the short answer is that we're not. The matter that the hon. member raises is related to the provincial hardship policy on the loss of assessment base. In the past the provincial policy was that a municipality that suffered a 5 percent or greater loss of its current year assessment base could apply for an education tax adjustment to their municipal requisition and be compensated for the loss of assessment. Beginning in the year . . . [interjection]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs, just ignore and please proceed.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Beginning in the 2000 year, the policy changed, reducing the threshold from 5 percent to 2 percent for all municipalities within the province, not just one. Now instead of having to suffer a 5 percent loss on their assessment base before the refund is considered, the municipality can qualify for any loss, and collectively it amounts to 2 percent. That is the new base that has been set.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplement is also to the same minister. Given the minister's comment, how can the city of Calgary claim that they are being discriminated against by this new policy?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it appears that the city of Calgary is doing this policy in the context of property owner appeals rather than in the significant losses of overall assessments. The overall assessment loss provision was put in place to basically deal with municipalities. This was done in 1994 to deal with issues such as loss of elevators, for example, railroad branchline abandonment, and relocation of industry. That was the purpose of this particular program. This so-called hardship policy of 5 percent refund threshold was made available to all the municipalities within the province. The city of Calgary, it appears, had previously taken a wider view on this policy and used it to mitigate successful property tax appeals. Indeed, this was something that was used to pool provincial dollars to compensate for errors made by city assessors in the evaluation of assessment process.

Mr. Speaker, the city of Calgary and all other municipalities will still qualify for the refund in the amount of 2 percent where there is a total loss in the live assessment. The city, however, will have to be responsible for the first 2 percent in that loss.

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

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Has the city of Calgary made application for a refund for 1999, and what is the amount of the refund they will qualify for?

2:50

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I understand that the city of Calgary has made applications for refunds in the past as they dealt

with individual property assessment appeals. These refund requests have been responded to by the Department of Municipal Affairs as they have been received. For the year 1999, in answer to the question of the how much, a total of eight applications have been received, and to date the city has received an approximate amount of \$8 million that has been refunded or will shortly be refunded.

There are two different issues involved here, Mr. Speaker, and I think it's very critical and important that there be a true identification of the issues. One is a hardship appeal process that deals with loss of assessment. The other is a process that deals with reassessment values. Ultimately we want to recognize that that phase was put in place for all municipalities. It is now set at 2 percent rather than 5 percent and will treat all municipalities within this province on an equal and fair basis.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds from now the chair will recognize the first of several individuals with respect to Recognitions, but before we get to that, please join me in wishing the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane a happy birthday.

DR. TAYLOR: How old is she?

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science is absolutely out of order. If he chooses to stand, he will stand there attentively, and he will echo no voice whatsoever, because where he is right now he totally has no status in this Assembly. None.

head: Statement by the Speaker

Private Member's Motion 511

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I'd like to draw your attention to the item Motions other than Government Motions found at page 6 of today's Order Paper. If I could draw your attention to this, please. Members will note under that item that Motion 511, sponsored by the hon. Member for Calgary-West, has been amended, as is allowed under Standing Order 39(1).

The chair would like to note that the hon. member served notice well in advance of the four sitting day period stipulated in that Standing Order. However, due to some internal miscommunication, not the fault of the member, this notice did not appear on the Order Paper until today. While the notice falls slightly short of the four days' notice by several hours, the chair would ask for the indulgence of all the members regarding this matter so that we might proceed in its appropriate order in the number of days from now.

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, seven members today have indicated their desire to participate in Recognitions, so we'll proceed in this order: first of all, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Calgary Outriders Soccer Club

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Calgary Outriders soccer club was formed in May 1999. The team will travel in the summer of 2000 to the Gothia Cup in Sweden and the Dana Cup in Denmark. These are recognized as the two top European youth

tournaments. The girls are very excited about the prospect of traveling to Europe in July 2000, and I want to wish them the best of luck.

Mr. Speaker, the team members are head coach, Howard McGiffin; assistant coach, Tony Demassi; manager, Chris Phelan; assistant coach, Judy Grigg; trainer, Lesley Scullion. The players are Lois Bennett, Samantha Blood, Christie Buone, Stacey Deiure, Krista Demassi, Gillian Duffy, Kellie Fenton, Kyla Grigg, Stephanie and Michelle Hoogveld, Rachael Lovink, Carley Phelan, Kim Pyra, Diane Reid, my constituent, Michelle Rowe, Gleayne Saliba, Tayah Schreter-Gillespie, Katie Shaw, and Kate Sloan.

We wish them all the best of luck, Mr. Speaker.

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

Edmonton Downtown Business Association

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today to recognize the Edmonton Downtown Development Corporation. On May 5, 2000, they held their annual luncheon and awards. The recipients of the awards were the 104th Street Promenade, city of Edmonton; ArtsHab pilot project, Arts Habitat Association of Alberta; CIBC historic restoration and expansion, CIBC Developments; Donna at the Citadel, Donna Rumboldt; On Ninth, Westbank Projects; Railtown, Christenson Developments Ltd.; Stanley A. Milner Library expansion, Edmonton Public Libraries; Union Bank Inn expansion, Diane Kyle Buchanan.

The Downtown Business Association was established as a business revitalization zone in 1985. This year we celebrate the 15th year of their service. The Downtown Business Association is proud to have the responsibility to ensure economic growth and enhancement of all quality of life in the urban centre. The combination of the new and old ensures that we will continue to be a world-class city with a sense of community.

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

Nightingale Nights Celebration

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 12 more than 24,000 registered nurses in Alberta will recognize the 180th birthday of Ms Florence Nightingale. This special occasion will be honoured through a celebration of Nightingale Nights. The Alberta Registered Nurses Educational Trust will host five Nightingale Night dinners this Friday, to be held in Lethbridge, Calgary, Red Deer, Edmonton, and Grande Prairie. These events will raise funds for continuing nursing education.

Mrs. Betty Gourlay, chair of the Registered Nurses Educational Trust, said, and I quote: this is the inaugural community fund-raising event of the educational trust; we hope that the event promotes the positive roles that registered nurses have played in shaping our communities and their daily contributions that benefit the lives of Albertans.

I strongly agree with Mrs. Gourlay, Mr. Speaker, and I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in wishing the Alberta Registered Nurses Educational Trust the very best with their Nightingale Night celebration.

Thank you.

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

International Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Day

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I rise to

recognize May 12 as International Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Day, or Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Day. ME is a severe and disabling illness characterized by overwhelming fatigue, cognitive problems, and numerous other symptoms that can last for months, years, or decades, yet many are unaware of its impact. Statistics indicate that only one in four doctors can properly diagnose ME. It is also significant that in Alberta there is only one full-time clinic which treats ME, and the waiting list is more than 1,000. Hopefully ME Awareness Day will not only stimulate the awareness of the government, the public, and the professionals but also expedite the requirement for more funding for research, improved diagnostic techniques, training for doctors, treatments, and even, hopefully, a cure.

Thank you.

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

Youth Immigrants of Distinction Awards

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak in recognition of the recipients of youth immigrants of distinction awards, given out by the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society: Nilou Davoudi, Susan Doan, Samir Pradhan, Stephen Kung, and Casey Wang.

Their achievements and contributions to our society are amazing. For example, 13-year-old Nilou Davoudi came to Alberta from Iran when she was four. Besides academic achievement, she shows talent in piano, clarinet, landscape painting, writing essays and stories. She's also well known for her aboriginal beadwork art, that was part of an aboriginal artifacts exhibition in Calgary and Vancouver. Last year she was one of the Stampede parade princesses with her own creation of aboriginal headgear.

Susan Doan came from Vietnam when she was four. Nineteen years later she is a student at the Boston school of dental medicine. She was on the dean's list at UBC, a recipient of many awards in natural design engineering and rehabilitation sciences. She is also an award-winning pianist.

Thank you.

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

3:00

Norma Zopf

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday, May 6, I attended the United Way labour appreciation night. One of the honourees at the event was Norma Zopf. I would like to extend to her my congratulations on her accomplishments.

Norma began her work career as a city of Edmonton employee and shop steward for her union, CUPE. She then joined Stats Canada and initiated a complete revamping of their health and safety committee. All the while being a dedicated mother and community activist, she managed to facilitate courses on women and aging in the workforce and is a cofounder of the Kaazba Foundation for the purpose of sending children with disabilities to camps, Disneyland, ranches, and farms.

Ms Zopf is truly deserving of the award presented to her by the United Way as she gives freely of her time and has a history of volunteering throughout her life.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1885 Calgary Town Hall

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Tuesday, May 9, 2000, I had the pleasure of participating in the grand opening of the 1885

Calgary Town Hall at Heritage Park Historical Village. The successful conclusion of this millennium town hall recreation project makes Calgary one of the few cities in Canada that can boast the existence of all of its city halls. The first mayor of Calgary, His Worship George Murdock, made a very special appearance as master of ceremonies and explained what was happening 115 years ago in the optimistic one-year-old prairie town of Calgary. Such things happen in Canada's premier living historical village.

Special thanks to all three levels of government, the Heritage Park staff and volunteers, the Heritage Park Foundation, and the numerous community business partners and individual donors without whom this project would not have been possible. Congratulations, Heritage Park, on ensuring that yet more of our western heritage comes to life.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Opposition House Leader, you'll deal with the point of order on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition?

MR. DICKSON: Yes.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MS CALAHASEN: Madam Speaker, may we revert to Introduction of Guests prior to the other proceedings?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes. Before we deal with the point of order, I would ask for unanimous consent.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: Introduction of Guests
(reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and to Members of the Legislative Assembly two very handsome men who are sitting in the members' gallery. They are two people who represent various groups. Their names are Gerald Auger, with the wonderful smile, and Chief Jerry Goodswimmer, who is also from Sturgeon Lake. I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: On the point of order, hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much. I raise this on behalf of the Leader of the Official Opposition. I'll come to the authorities in just a second, but the words and conduct that I rise on occurred during the fourth set of questions by the Leader of the Opposition to the Premier. [interjection] The fourth, for those who weren't counting.

Madam Speaker, the question was asked, and then the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development said from his seat: ask your brother. The Leader of the Opposition does indeed have a brother who is a physician and a radiologist. The implication of the intervention by the minister is that the leader's brother in some sense improperly benefited or was improperly advantaged by actions of the leader when she was health minister. Now, it's true that the leader's brother is outside this Assembly and it's true he was not named, but the Speaker dealt with a similar situation last Thursday, May 4, 2000, and that starts at page 1336 and goes on for four pages in *Hansard*.

The two submissions I'd make would be this. Firstly, I'd cite the Speaker's ruling at pages 1339 and 1340. At that time the Speaker required a formal, express, and extensive apology. I'd submit that no less full a remedy would be required here, because this was compounded by the subsequent reference by the Minister of Health and Wellness in terms of actions taken by the leader when she was then minister, once again the implication being somehow advantaging her brother the radiologist.

I'd refer to sessional paper 149/95, dated March 2, 1995, where the government answered Written Question 149 as follows: "Private MRI clinics were not in operation prior to May, 1993. Prior to this access to a MRI was through the publicly funded system in a hospital."

Now, I incorporate by way of authorities the references cited by the Government House Leader on May 4, 2000, at pages 1336, 1337: *Erskine May*; *Beauchesne* 64, page 19; page 52 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* – he did an excellent job in terms of reviewing the authorities – and also page 1337. I would add one, and it's Marleau and Montpetit, their *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 524:

Members are discouraged from referring by name to persons who are not Members of Parliament and who do not enjoy parliamentary immunity, except in extraordinary circumstances where the national interest . . .

Parenthetically, that would presumably be read provincial interest. . . . calls for the naming of an individual. The Speaker has ruled that Members have a responsibility to protect the innocent, not only from outright slander but from any slur directly or indirectly implied, and has stressed that Members should avoid as much as possible mentioning by name people from outside the House who are unable to reply and defend themselves against innuendo.

The Speaker made it abundantly clear last Thursday that by implication, whether you mention the name or not – in that case it was a reference. Somebody said: you go down to the Ethics Commissioner's office and you can unearth the same information. Well, here it's even easier. There would only be one conceivable purpose for the minister of agriculture to have made that comment he did from his seat. I would ask that you require, Madam Speaker, at the very least the same kind of full, complete, and comprehensive apology that the Speaker required last Thursday. To do any less would suggest that we have one set of rules when it's a friend of the Premier involved and another set of rules when it's the relative or a close acquaintance of any other member of the Assembly. I don't believe for a moment that you would countenance that sort of a differential treatment.

Those are my observations, and that's my request. Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Madam Speaker, it is, I think, astonishing that the hon. Opposition House Leader would have the temerity to compare the events of last Thursday with the events of today.

The events of last Thursday, to refresh the memory of those in the House and those who read the record, dealt with a member of this House, a member who had been recognized to speak, asking a question and doing something in asking that question where there could be no other interpretation of the asking of the question than an attempt to besmirch the character and the trust and the integrity of a member of this Assembly. That's what the Speaker dealt with in his ruling at that time. [interjection] The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora doesn't have the courtesy to even listen to members speaking in the House.

Madam Speaker, that's what happened last Thursday. There was

a serious breach of privilege in this House last Thursday when the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert rose on a question, asked a question which clearly had no other purpose than to besmirch the integrity of our Premier. If a member of this House or anyone else has a question about the dealings of people in this House or the dealings of people associated with people in this House, there's a process that's put in place by this House to deal with those questions. The Speaker at that time agreed with the representations I made, that because we consider that to be of utmost importance, when those sorts of questions come up, if they do, members should avail themselves of that process rather than raise questions inappropriately in the House. That's what happened last Thursday. The apology that was given – no, I'm not going to go there. Sorry.

3:10

To compare that to what happened today is absolutely inappropriate. What happened today is that there was a question on the floor by somebody who had been recognized about diagnostic imaging, and there was an answer being given about diagnostic imaging. If I recall the question correctly – and I don't have the Blues, but you perhaps do – there was a whole question of disclosure of information. When would that information be public?

I would suggest, although not having had the opportunity to discuss with the hon. minister whose comment is being called into question, a comment which was not on the record of the House until it was put on the record by the Opposition House Leader, a comment which may or may not, subject to checking, actually have been said – given that it might have been said, it can clearly be read into the context of the question and answer. The hon. opposition leader was asking for information about contracts, and the member was saying: ask your brother, because he's in that business. [interjections]

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who again doesn't have the courtesy to listen to people in this House and gets emotional about these things rather than dealing with issues instead of personalities, raises the question about timing. The whole question of diagnostic imaging has been changing over time, and I'm not going to answer on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness as to the time frames involved.

The point of order related specifically, as I understand it, to a comment made by someone who was not on the record. Quite frankly, I would agree with the member if he said that such comments ought not to be made. I know the Speaker would agree that we should not be shouting comments back and forth. The provocative nature of this House, being two swords' length apart from each other, and the emotional outbreaks that come from time to time, as has been exhibited clearly this afternoon during this point of order, sometimes provoke people to make comments. We ought not to make those comments.

There was no affront intended by that comment, I would suggest. There was no integrity questioned by that comment, I would suggest. That comment can be clearly read into the context of the question and answer at the time and was clearly not intended to impugn the integrity of any person either inside or outside this House.

MR. LUND: Well, Madam Speaker, this is about as ridiculous as it could get. If the hon. leader – and I don't know their family; I don't know her brother; I don't know her; I don't know their relationship – is so sensitive about whether her brother has a contract or not, if she's so sensitive about his operating a private MRI, then I am sorry that I even brought the issue up. I don't know whether they have that relationship. So if she has great difficulty with admitting that he has an MRI and has a contract, something that I don't know, then I wish that I hadn't touched that little nerve that caused the problem,

if she is so sensitive about his operating a clinic in the province of Alberta.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Edmonton-Glenora.

MR. SAPERS: Thanks, Madam Speaker. I participated in the exchange that took place last Thursday that the Government House Leader was referring to and which was referenced by the Official Opposition House Leader. It's very fresh and very clear in my mind what transpired and what the judgment coming from the chair was and then what happened after that judgment.

I would say this. The Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development only had one purpose in mind, clearly, when he made that interjection. For him to say that this issue is about the Leader of the Official Opposition is malicious. This is about his behaviour, Madam Speaker, and his words, his alone. He should have the ability to stand and clearly distance himself from those inappropriate comments and apologize without trying to slither out that it's somehow an issue about the Leader of the Official Opposition. So I would hope that you are not going to accept those words as an apology, because clearly they will not be acceptable.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I would say that that context wasn't in keeping with what is required, hon. member.

First off, I'm going to deal with two parts of this point of order. I was not in the chair at the time this was supposedly said and did not hear the interjection. However, *Beauchesne* 486(4) states that remarks not on the public record and not heard by the chair do not invite the intervention of the chair. I would however like to remind everyone, though, that members who do refer to people outside this House, outside the Assembly – it is inappropriate as they are not here and they do not have the opportunity to reply. So I would ask that you take that into consideration. There is a big difference between an interjection, a heckle, and something that is on the record, and as far as I can see, this isn't on the record.

The second part was the reference made in the answer by the Minister of Health and Wellness. I think this is more a point of clarification and not a point of order. Given the wording in the Blues and the tone and context in which these statements were made, this doesn't appear to be a point of order. It is not inappropriate for a minister to comment when a particular government policy commenced, and that in my estimation was what the Minister of Health and Wellness was doing.

I would ask that for the remainder of this afternoon and hopefully tonight we do try to keep the tone down and remember that we have to utilize decorum.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places with the exception of motions for returns 33, 34, 35, 40, 44, 45, 48, and 49.

[Motion carried]

User Fees

M33. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents prepared for Alberta Treasury by government departments between November 1, 1998, and April 30, 2000, evaluating the cost of service and revenues associated with user fees, licences, premiums, and charges levied by government departments.

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This, as you know, has been a matter of some considerable discussion and interest to the people of Alberta ever since the Eurig decision ruled that user fees which collected revenues in excess of the cost of service were in fact taxes and any Legislature that had user fees of that nature was illegally assessing taxes against its citizens and a move must be made to correct that.

Now, we saw that there was a review undertaken in the province of Alberta as a result of the Eurig estate decision. I will say that it was interesting to me that the province of Alberta intervened in that decision, trying to protect the status quo in maintaining the imposition of user fees even though they very well may exceed the cost of service. Regardless of the province's intervention it failed, and of course the decision was made that these kinds of user fees are illegal taxes.

3:20

As events unfolded, the province asked the hon. Member for St. Albert to head a review, and what is being referred to as the O'Neill report was subsequently compiled. That report, we're told, resulted in some \$60 million being trimmed off user fees. We know, for example, from comments made by the Minister of Government Services that there were some 94 fees in Alberta Registries, which in fact were illegal forms of taxation, which had to be rolled back. So they no doubt make up part of that \$60 million. But the \$60 million is literally a drop in the bucket, because the \$60 million rolled back out of a total collected in excess of \$1.3 billion is over 800 user fees that this government now expects its citizens to pay in addition to all of the forms of taxation that this government expects its citizens to contribute.

What we are asking for in this motion for a return is the evidence that shows that the government evaluated the costs of services so that we can make an independent judgment regarding whether or not this \$60 million of rolled back or trimmed user fees is appropriate or if in fact there should be some further work in that area. So I would hope the government, in keeping with its often stated policy of being open and accountable, would respond in the affirmative to this motion for a return.

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

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Acting Provincial Treasurer I must reject this request. Of course, the fact is that there was no document prepared for Alberta Treasury during this period.

I must add, Madam Speaker, that the cuts that were made were as

a result of the interim report of the Fees and Charges Review Committee.

MR. SAPERS: Well, it's very interesting that there was no document. As a matter of fact, we have information coming from the freedom of information and protection of privacy administrator for Alberta Treasury that there are documents that have been prepared relative to the cost of service between 1998 and April 3, 2000. I'm a little bit confused. We have documents from Alberta Treasury saying that there are documents, but they don't want to give them to Albertans, and now we have the minister on behalf of the Acting Treasurer saying that there aren't any documents.

I'd like to know which is the truth, and I'd like to know, if there was an error made, who was responsible for the error. Clearly, there has been work done by Treasury and work done, probably, in every department that collects user fees. I myself have written to every minister of Executive Council asking for information on their user-fee regime, and most departments complied quite willingly and sent back some information. So it is inconceivable that there aren't documents. The plausible explanation here is that the government wants to keep these documents a secret, and I would then suggest that the reason why they want to keep them a secret is because they reflect poorly on the government's actions subsequent to the compiling of that information.

Now, if the government doesn't want to take responsibility for doing the work or if the work was done poorly, that's one thing, but I would like to request that the minister on behalf of the Acting Treasurer on behalf of the Treasurer go back and review the correspondence record in this matter and as quickly as he possibly can come back to the House and explain the confusion between his statement that there are no documents and the information that we have from Alberta Treasury that in fact there are documents.

Maybe at that point, once that confusion is straightened out, the House will be in a better position to pass a vote on whether or not they would support the government's rejection of this very legitimate and very important information request.

[Motion for a Return 33 lost]

Single-rate Tax Plan

M34. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of base case forecast tables and change in marginal tax rates by income class of taxpayers prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period January 1, 1999, to April 3, 2000, associated with the implementation of the government's 11 percent single-rate tax plan.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course, when this motion for a return was put on the Order Paper, the government's official position on their tax plan was to move to a single rate, or a flat tax, of 11 percent. The Acting Treasurer has subsequently tabled in question period and, I may add, quite inappropriately tabled at the wrong point in proceedings, some suggested amendments. So the government's tax plan, we believe, may now be to move to a flat tax of 10 and a half percent, but I would hope that this technicality would not be the basis of the government's rejection of this motion for a return.

Clearly, the intent of this motion for a return is to take a look at the homework done by the government when they came up with their very unfair flat tax plan, and if the government would like

Albertans to believe that it is a fair flat tax plan, well, then they can help build their case by showing us this background information and this homework.

The important part of the motion for a return doesn't hinge around the percentage rate of the flat tax. The heart of the matter is the homework, and of course the model being used you could plug in any number. So while I acknowledge that the flat tax plan of the government may now be 10 and a half percent, the fact is that when this was put on the Order Paper, the government's stated intention and the bill that was before the House was in fact an 11 percent rate.

In any case, the issue is the same. We would like to see the evidence. We'd like to see the base case forecast tables and the change in the marginal tax rates, and we'd like to see it broken down by classes of taxpayers because then Albertans will have a much better idea on the true impact of this flat tax proposal and would no doubt agree with those critics of this flat tax that like every other flat tax this is an unfair one, which shifts the burden to the middle-income taxpayer in the province.

Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on behalf of the Acting Treasurer.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Acting Treasurer we must reject this motion for a return.

I think it's important to note that the personal income tax forecast resulting from the 11 percent single tax plan was included in the revenue tables in both Budget '99 and Budget 2000. In Budget 2000 the revenue table on page 40 shows the personal income tax forecast for the next three years: \$4.7 billion in 2000-2001, \$4.8 billion in 2001-2002, and \$5.1 billion in 2002-2003.

Budget 2000 also includes the Alberta tax advantage chapter that details the whole tax plan, and since January 1, 1999, Treasury has not prepared any detailed calculations of changes in marginal tax rates by gross income of taxpayers. The marginal tax rate by income depends not only on the tax rate but also on all the credits and deductions claimed by the taxpayer. Under the new tax system the marginal tax rate on taxable income is pretty straightforward. It is 11 percent of taxable income. From that, the taxpayer then deducts the value of their nonrefundable credits, 11 percent of the basic and spousal exemptions of \$11,620 and other credits. The only exception to the 11 percent value of credits is for charitable donations, where the credit is 11 percent on the first \$200 donated and 12.75 percent on the rest. This dual rate maintains the same credit value as the existing system on donations over \$200.

3:30

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, we seem to be witness to some interesting policy development. If I understood the minister speaking on behalf of the Acting Treasurer, who is here on behalf of the Treasurer, what he just read into the record was the suggestion that the government is not moving to lower the flat tax rate from 11 to 10.5 percent and is not increasing the personal exemption. His answer just confirmed that in fact the marginal rates will still be based on an 11 percent flat tax rate and at the previously announced personal exemption level.

Again, I'm very curious to know who's really speaking for tax policy in this province. It seems to change from day to day and from moment to moment. Albertans, I think, would like to know what this government has in mind for them. It should not be a game of

Wheel of Fortune when it comes to predicting tax rates for the tax filers in this province. [interjection]

You know, I find it curious, Madam Speaker, that the hon. Government House Leader is now making interjections from his chair after admonishing me for interjecting while he was speaking. I guess I would just ask him to exhibit the same courtesy that he asked me to exhibit when he was speaking, and I know he will.

What I was saying is that I find it curious, again, that there would be no analysis done at these marginal rates, because without that kind of analysis being done, of course, it's very hard to substantiate the claims that the Premier and others have made in regard to which taxpayers are going to receive what kind of benefit. So if the analysis hasn't been done, then those claims that are being made by members of Executive Council are very suspect, and if the analysis has been done and we're being told it hasn't been done, well, that creates a problem of an entirely different nature; doesn't it, Madam Speaker?

In fact, if I look at December 21, 1999, correspondence from the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner regarding request for review 1658, I will learn and, Madam Speaker, so will you that there are "over 300 pages of responsive records" made to an information request of a similar nature. I quote from the summary table that was provided by the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Pages 167 to 184 and pages 185 to 202 of that package include the "February base case forecast tables with tax plan" and the "February base case forecast tables without tax plan." So, again, we're being told that the work isn't being done, but under other circumstances we're told the work is being done. We're being told the rate might be one level; then we're being told the rate might be another level. Truly confusion.

I'm beginning to understand why the government is hesitant to share this information with Albertans. They clearly don't know what direction they're heading in, and it doesn't appear that one part of the department knows what another part is doing.

In any case, it's disappointing but not surprising, based on the confusion, that the government would reject this particular request for information. But, you know, the members of this House have the opportunity to hold the government accountable. I note that the members of the Executive Council would be easily outvoted by all of the private members in this House if, in fact, private members decided that what they wanted was to share this kind of very important information with Albertans as we enter into the next round of debate on their unfair flat tax plan.

[Motion for a Return 34 lost]

MR. SAPERS: It's nice to know my record won't be affected by today's voting, Madam Speaker.

Single-rate Tax Plan

M35. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all documents estimating the revenue impact and economic offset prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period June 1, 1999, to April 3, 2000, associated with the implementation of the government's 11 percent single-rate tax plan.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I'm forever optimistic, and I will hold my comments on this, thinking that perhaps I argued myself out of support. So I'll simply read the request into the record and throw myself at the mercy and understanding of the government and ask them to support this request.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on behalf of the Acting Provincial Treasurer.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Acting Treasurer I must reject this. The silly argument that we just heard and had to bear through – in Motion 34 he specifically asked for information related to the 11 percent single plan. That's what he asked for, and that's what it was.

Now, Madam Speaker, you know, I could simply use the reason that he just simply argued his way out of this Motion 35 by insisting on talking about a plan that the Acting Treasurer has signaled is going to be introduced into the discussion on Bill 18, because he's asking once again for information on the 11 percent flat tax rate. I will read the reasons why, beyond the fact that we should probably just use the fact that he obviously doesn't know what he's really asking for, because, as he claims now, he didn't want information about the 11 percent but wanted information about the 10.5 percent. Anyway, we'll give him this information, the reasons for our rejection, putting aside that argument that he just made.

Details on the elimination of the economic offset were contained in Budget '99. Page 14 of Budget 2000 provides updated estimates of the revenue impact and economic offset of the 11 percent tax rate plan. Albertans' taxes will have been cut by \$852 million in the 2001 tax year relative to 1998 as a result of the tax plan at the 11 percent, Madam Speaker. Of course, that number will change and will go up considerably with the changes that the Provincial Treasurer has signaled will happen in the debate of Bill 18. This is partially offset by \$181 million in additional revenue from stronger economic growth due to the tax plan, reducing the cost to the government to about \$671 million.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair would have you duly note that your motion for a return does specifically talk about 11 percent.

MR. SAPERS: What would exactly be the point of the chair making that comment?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Because, hon. member, obviously the answer has to do with what you have requested and asked for.

MR. SAPERS: I read it into the record. I'm fully familiar with what I was asking for. Thank you for that clarification, Madam Speaker.

The government can't really have it both ways. The fact is that I was anticipating a rather shallow argument from the government suggesting that the motions for returns were somehow inappropriate because the government has moved past the 11 percent flat tax and has gone to this other rate. The motions for returns stand on the Order Paper and are very straightforward. My assumption is still that the work that was done was done in support of the 11 percent rate. It was subsequent to the federal budget, of course, that the provincial government in Alberta had to scramble because the federal government had provided a really substantive tax relief to Albertans, and in order for those Albertans not to be cheated out of that tax relief, the government had to go and remake its tax policy on the fly.

As I said in my earlier comments about Motion for a Return 34, the fact is that the homework, the background work, that would have to be done would still be done. The model would still be an equivalent model. I would say that in Motion for a Return 35 the important issue isn't the number that appears between the word "government's" and the word "single." The important issue is the rest of the motion for a return.

If the government has done this work – and you would expect that they would, of course, since it's such a major part of their platform, and we all know it's become such a major part of the former Treasurer's springboard into his dreams of leadership for another party at the national level – you would expect that that homework is there and that the government would be anxious to share their best case with Albertans. But for some reason known only to the government they're not anxious to share that information or that best case with Albertans, and perhaps it's because this flat tax is more about ideology than it is about good social policy.

3:40

The government makes all kinds of claims in its budget plan regarding the economic impact and, in fact, predicts an astronomical feedback based on its tax plan. It's a feedback that has not been supported in any experience anywhere on the globe. So this is a very important issue. I'm a little surprised that the government is treating it so lightly, particularly since they seem to be desperate to have some political lifeboat to cling to after the debacle with their private health care bill and the loss of trust and the loss of face that the government has suffered as a result of the way they're handling themselves regarding Bill 11. But, you know, I'm not going to pretend to be a strategist for the provincial government. I'll let them be the authors of their own doom.

The disturbing element of all of this, Madam Speaker, is that perhaps the government hasn't done any breakdown. Maybe they haven't prepared any information about the economic impact attributable to various parts of the tax plan. Maybe they have really been driven blindly by their ideology and have decided that they don't need to do any of the number-crunching because they're not going to be responsive to any queries or questions or criticism, that they'll have the same heads-down and damn the torpedoes attitude about their tax plan as they've had about other important pieces of legislation. That would be yet another indication of the level of arrogance which now surrounds government policymaking in Alberta.

This is a very reasonable request. The documents should be a matter of public record. We cannot accept that no work has been done within or on behalf of Treasury. You know, I can only ask once again that private members not be led by the hesitancy of Executive Council to come clean with Albertans. We still have an opportunity to do the right thing and to cast our votes in such a way as we can tell the government to provide the information being requested.

[Motion for a Return 35 lost]

Maintenance Enforcement Technology

M40. Mrs. Sloan moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of the maintenance enforcement program, MEP, business process improvement strategy on systems and procedures that are in place to protect and update investments in technology.

MRS. SLOAN: Madam Speaker, the motion arose from repetitive mention of this strategy which was contained in the MLA review of maintenance enforcement and access. I would just like to read into the record specifically recommendations 37 and 38.

Recommendation 37 read: "MEP review the way it deals with information technology to ensure that proper systems and procedures are in place to protect and update its investments in technology." The action from the government within this review report was that "this is part of the business process improvement strategy."

Recommendation 38 read: "MEP ensure that its computer system accommodate the National Data Requirements when they become applicable." The action by government read:

This is part of the business process improvement strategy. An electronic interface to improve contact with Justice Canada on federal garnishees and licences is targeted for November 1998.

Further, Madam Speaker, recommendation 11 contained within the MLA review of maintenance enforcement read: "Alberta Justice consider the implementation of 'real time' technology in the MEP computer . . . to facilitate better and more timely service to clients." Again, the action by government read that it "is included in the redevelopment of mainframe technology projected in [the next] 3 years."

We have not had nor has the public had an opportunity to see the proposed MEP business process improvement strategy, and that is the essence of the question before this House this afternoon.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the House in the past few weeks I've been happy to accept questions from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre with respect to the maintenance enforcement program. However, today I have to reject this question. But I want to put the rejection in a context. I will certainly be happy to provide information on an ongoing basis to the member relating to the business improvement process.

The problem with the question and accepting the question is that we are undertaking a review of the business processes to plan for replacement of the system, so in the context of the recommendations that the hon. member just read into the record now, we're a little behind in the process, but we are in the process now of developing a plan for the replacement of the maintenance enforcement tracking system.

The strategy to update the technology will be outlined in a document which is to be called the maintenance enforcement program business process review phase. The document has not yet been completed, so a copy of it cannot be provided. We anticipate that the maintenance enforcement program business process review phase, which I believe is the document and the information which the member wants, will be completed by the fall of 2000 or earlier, and subject to any considerations that may arise once I've reviewed that document, I would anticipate that I will be in a position to provide a copy of it to the member at that time.

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

MRS. SLOAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We'll take those comments under advisement.

[Motion for a Return 40 lost]

Special Waste Management Corporation

M44. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of budget and financial reports for the period January 1, 1999, to April 5, 2000, as required pursuant to articles 9.7.1, 9.8.1, and 9.8.2 of the July 12, 1996, agreement between the government of Alberta, the Alberta Special Waste Management Corporation, Bovar Technology Ltd., Bovar Inc., Bovar (Swan Hills) Limited Partnership, 542936 Alberta Ltd., and Chem-Security (Alberta) Ltd.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We've gone down this road of the government's relationship with Bovar and the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been put at risk, if not wasted, and the government's moves to get out of this agreement for some time. This financial reporting information is part of the contract, and I think Albertans deserve to see it as part of the government's commitment to accountability and transparency in matters regarding the fiscal operations of the province of Alberta.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I move that Motion for a Return 44 be rejected. This information has been requested previously through FOIP and was not released at that time due to privacy concerns related to harm of business interests, and I'm unable to release it at this time for the same reason.

MR. SAPERS: Well, that's unfortunate. I mean, I would submit that the harm has really been to the public interest, not to the private business interests, and it would seem to me that even the access to information legislation provides for a public interest override, so where the public interest will be served, those selfish third-party interests can be set aside. If the government was truly living up to its commitment about openness, it would accept this information request.

[Motion for a Return 44 lost]

3:50

Special Waste Treatment Centre

M45. Mr. Sapers moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of studies, reports, memoranda, correspondence, and background documents prepared by or for the Department of Environment or sent to the Department of Environment for the period January 1, 1999, to April 5, 2000, relating to a change in ownership of the Alberta Special Waste Management Treatment Centre, Swan Hills, and the importation of hazardous waste from outside of Canada.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that Motion for a Return 45 be rejected. The information being requested by the hon. member is currently under FOIP review, and I am unable to release it until the decision has been made as to whether such a disclosure is harmful to business interests.

MR. SAPERS: Madam Speaker, I understand I have an opportunity to close debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Yes. Do you wish to conclude debate?

MR. SAPERS: Thank you.

The rejection doesn't surprise me, but once again it disappoints me. The Alberta special waste management facility in Swan Hills has already cost Alberta taxpayers about \$440 million in terms of money invested, and recently there's been controversy regarding the reversal of a long-standing understanding that there would not be an importation of hazardous wastes from other jurisdictions. Of course, the government is now trying to do that to provide the feedstock, as it were, to this plant, which has never operated in an economical way.

If I look at the annual financial statement for Bovar in their annual report for 1999, there's one section of it that makes it very specific that the corporation has the right to transfer the treatment centre to the province at any time after December 31, 1998, for a nominal amount. That typically means for a dollar, Madam Speaker. So we're sort of on a hair trigger right now. Any day we could learn that as a result of some of the work that was done by the Government House Leader in his private life before politics or by the Minister of Economic Development in his previous responsibilities, having been asked by the Premier to negotiate the deal with Bovar, as a result of all of that history, at any moment the people of Alberta could have that Swan Hills plant back in their ownership and for the grand sum of maybe a single loonie.

Because of the history, because of the controversy surrounding not just the plant itself but this latest policy initiative to bring in hazardous waste from other jurisdictions, because of the dollar value and the volume of taxpayer money involved with all of this, I would expect that the provincial government would be anxious to show us copies of these studies and memoranda and correspondence regarding the potential transfer of ownership between the province of Alberta and the owners of the Special Waste Treatment Centre.

Again, all I can do is ask members of the Assembly to work with me in holding this government accountable. Private members, we have the opportunity to do what many people are in a state of disbelief about, and that is to have this government live up to its word when it comes to being open and accountable.

[Motion for a Return 45 lost]

Forest Protection Advisory Committee

M48. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the minutes of each meeting of the Forest Protection Advisory Committee held in the calendar years 1998 and 1999.

MR. MAR: Madam Speaker, I will accept Motion for a Return 48.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo to conclude debate?

MR. DICKSON: No. That's fine.

[Motion for a Return 48 carried]

Forest Management Science Council

M49. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. White that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the meeting summaries and council reports of all the meetings of the Alberta Forest Management Science Council held from January 23, 1998, to April 13, 2000.

MR. DICKSON: Quickly, while that same spirit of co-operation seems to be so manifest in the Assembly.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I regret to say that I must move that Motion for a Return 49 be rejected. I'm rejecting the motion for a return as the specific information that is requested in the form of meeting summaries and council reports was not in fact compiled for the Forest Management Science Council. However, a final statement of account for this council was submitted to me in June of last year, and I will table that statement of account now for

the member's reference. I believe it includes all of the information that has been sought by the member opposite, including recommendations made by the council. So I've done my best to fulfill this request.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on behalf of Edmonton-Calder.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We appreciate what appear to be the best efforts of the minister. We'll review that material, and hopefully that will provide the information that my colleague was looking for.

Thank you very much.

[Motion for a Return 49 lost]

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

Bill 206
School (Students' Code of Conduct)
Amendment Act, 2000

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise here in third reading of Bill 206, the School (Students' Code of Conduct) Amendment Act. I'm going to be brief in my comments. I do want to reiterate, though, what Bill 206 will do for students and for schools and for proper conduct, hopefully, in Alberta. I'm convinced that with the amendments passed in Committee of the Whole, the code of conduct that Bill 206 proposes will be an integral part in making our schools and our school environments safe and productive places for everyone.

As I have stated before, this legislation is not intended to solve all of our school problems, but it does put in place the minimum standards of behaviour and the consequences for violating them. I see a code of conduct being incorporated into an overall strategy in conjunction with positive policies like the Safe and Caring Schools initiative and the input that was put forward by the Task Force on Children at Risk in the task force document entitled Start Young, Start Now. Those two references will help to create a safer and more respectful learning environment, and Bill 206 is very, very close to doing a number of the initiatives that those policies put forward.

Madam Speaker, a code of conduct fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect in which everyone knows what is expected of them. As I have stated before, students have the right to a stable learning environment and a safe school, but also they have the responsibility of maintaining that environment by following the rules that they have helped establish and not rules that are established for them.

Madam Speaker, I have been asked by many people and particularly school principals and some school administrators: what happens if we already have a policy on student behaviour and it's working? I will repeat publicly in this House what I have said to them in private. I can assure you and I want to assure everybody in this Assembly that if a school has a policy on conduct and behaviour which is working well in their school and that has been derived through consultation with community stakeholders, by all means they keep it. The only thing this legislation will be asking them to do is make sure that that policy is in writing, if they already do not have it in writing. The purpose of Bill 206 is not to interfere where

things are working well. It is to make sure that they are working well everywhere.

4:00

Madam Speaker, in reference to the concerns of the Alberta School Boards Association – many members here may have got a copy of some of their concerns about this bill – I think the amendments presented by my colleague from Calgary-Egmont dealt with them head-on. The main amendment to the bill broadens the legislation so that the prescription of behaviours included in the code of conduct are not so rigid. This allows schools to have some leeway in determining what will work best to provide a safe environment. I agree with the Alberta School Boards Association that schools and communities need the ability to create the code of conduct that will work best for them and the unique nature of each and every person in each and every school.

As well, Madam Speaker, the Alberta School Boards Association has said that there are not enough funds available for counseling and are worried about the counseling provision in Bill 206. I understand their concerns and I empathize with their concerns, but as we know, a private member's bill cannot be a money bill. Therefore, I can't ask for funds on this. I think the Alberta School Boards Association will be pleased to know that when it comes time to act on the task force recommendation, I will be an advocate that we should recognize that more funds be provided for counseling for our students where appropriate. This is a positive initiative coming down the road and will be something for school boards to address in the long term.

So with that, Madam Speaker, I would like to end my comments today by thanking every member in this House for listening to the debate and providing excellent feedback. I truly believe that the debate on Bill 206 and the amendments to it have made the legislation stronger, and I thank all of my colleagues in the Legislature for that.

I will finish by urging all of my colleagues to support this modest yet important initiative for Alberta schools and the students in our schools. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a third time]

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

Bill 208
Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned May 9: Mr. Wickman speaking]

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

MR. WICKMAN: Yes. Madam Speaker, in the remaining four minutes that I have to conclude my 20 minutes in speaking to the bill presented by the Leader of the Official Opposition, Bill 208, which is the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, 2000, I want to go to the report that was prepared by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler on December 19, 1998, called Gaming in Review. I just want to read one portion here that is boxed in. It's acknowledged as being said by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

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!

Now, those are some words of wisdom we should all heed.

We talk in terms of the revenue-generating considerations. That

of course is the cash cow, the amounts of money that the machines and the other various forms of gambling spit out in this province. But that member, possibly the only member on the government side – at least, the others haven't come out publicly stating so – recognizes, as we do in the Liberal opposition, that there has to be political courage to put in place the proper policy controls and enforcement measures to ensure that gambling does not become an extremely negative influence on the community, which it does to a very, very large extent already.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Thus we have Bill 208, which has been brought forward because basically this caucus is saying that we are in agreement with the recommendations that are in the report entitled *Gaming in Review*, done by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Again, to kind of just sum up those particular recommendations, the main recommendations. We would see it proposing the establishment of a gaming secretariat to advise the minister on gaming policies. It would require that all gaming supplies purchased by the gaming commission be purchased by public tender. It would create an all-party standing committee on gaming to review the gaming act on a regular basis, to report on the separation of the administrative and enforcement functions of the commission, to review and report on funding police with lottery money to prevent and fight organized crime, to review and report on funding gambling addiction treatment with a legislated proportion of gambling revenues; in other words, some type of percentage, whatever, an allocation recognizing the total amounts of dollars that are being generated, which is now close to a billion dollars. Also, the requirement of municipal approval for new gaming operations or an expansion of existing gaming operations.

That last one, as I had said earlier in my comments, is recognition of the decision-making rights that municipalities have in matters that affect their community. They do have that right, which is bestowed upon them by the electors that choose to put them in place. At times the provincial government may regard itself as the mother government to the municipalities and at times feel that they know what's best for them, but the municipalities, by and large, know what's best for their particular community.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'll conclude. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo.

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I don't know really what to say. I think it's very interesting when the opposition takes a report, a government report, and puts it into a bill. I don't know whether that's a form of flattery. I suppose it is. It's a hard one to explain.

I do, for the sake of the record, want to clarify a few things. This report was done and submitted in December of 1998, which the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford has indicated. This report was threefold. One section was certainly relevant to the work of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General at the time, and it looked at illegal gaming and criminal activity. The other part had to do with the distribution of lottery funds, and that went to the Minister of Community Development. The first part, that looked at the Ontario gaming model, went to the minister at that time responsible for gaming.

I spent close to a week in Ontario and met with several individuals that have spent a great deal of time on gaming and gaming issues. I think one of the things that I noted with interest and that I felt

needed to be studied and looked at in Alberta was what Ontario had done as far as regulatory functions, separate from operating and separate from policy-making. They basically have split out in their organization chart a ministry that looks after the operation and policy, which is very different than the ministry that looks after the regulation. I heard some very, very good comments, not only from key stakeholders in the industry in Ontario but also from administration. I did meet with the two ministers responsible, and they said that it was working very, very well.

Part of Bill 208, as sponsored by the Leader of the Official Opposition, talks about several of the things that I did make reference to in my report. One was a gaming secretariat. A gaming secretariat is also utilized in Ontario and is responsible for providing leadership and looking at policy development and direction for implementing the government's gaming initiatives. They co-ordinate several aspects to do with the gaming operation through the Ontario Lottery Corporation and the Ontario Casino Corporation. They assess the ongoing performance of gaming activities. As well, I found one thing interesting. They have a team of individuals that work with the secretariat that basically was a liaison with communities.

4:10

Ontario is different in gaming because they have the three large casinos, that basically fall under the Ontario Lottery Corporation. One is at Niagara Falls, which is a beautiful casino overlooking the falls, one is at Windsor, and the other is in Orillia, Ontario. The requests for proposal are put out for managing these casinos. Actually, for two out of the three it is casino companies out of Las Vegas that look after the management of it. Over the last couple of years the Ontario government has looked at our model, the charity model, and decided to look at this in a number of communities. Now, if my memory serves me correctly, they sent out invitations to 44 communities in Ontario to see if they'd be interested in a community charitable model type of casino. Of the 44, only 18 communities were receptive to having that type of casino in their midst.

Getting back to this liaison group that works with the Ontario Gaming Secretariat, their job was to go out and meet with municipal officials, meet with the community at large to see if in fact this would work. I thought that was an interesting approach. But I have to say that since the time of this report, the Alberta government and the Ministry of Gaming have put in place the Gaming Research Institute. Now, I think we will have to wait and see exactly what comes forth from that institute. There is, I think, \$1.5 million going to the operational side of the institute. There are a number of very respected individuals that will be serving on the gaming institute, and I think we will wait and see what the results are.

One thing I found very, very interesting – and basically it was the thrust of my trip – was the illegal gaming and the criminal activity. I do have to say that I was very, very impressed with what has happened in Ontario. Ontario is served by a provincial police force, the Ontario Provincial Police. In 1996 they only had in Ontario two full-time illegal-gaming enforcement units. Since then they have put in place the Ontario illegal-gaming enforcement unit, with its own location, its own members, and its own budget. They work with the Ontario minister of justice, and their budget is \$4.7 million. These gentlemen – at the time I was there, they were all male officers – have spent a great deal of time and study to become very, very knowledgeable about illegal gaming and criminal activities. They're very knowledgeable on illegal video lottery terminals, common gaming houses and social clubs, bookmaking, pyramid schemes, slot

fraud, Internet gaming, and of course the overall regulation and surveillance that goes into casinos.

The gentleman that heads this unit is a detective inspector by the name of Larry Moodie. Actually, a number of law enforcement agencies across Canada and the U.S. do send their people to Ontario – their office is in Barrie, Ontario – where Detective Inspector Larry Moodie and his admin staff put on training courses for other officers. They detailed for me several examples of illegal gaming machines and how they're moved about the province, how they track them down, what they confiscate, how it ends up after it goes to court. They talked about a number of illegal gaming houses and poker clubs that basically they have had to enter and close down and what happened as a result of some of these raids. So it was very, very interesting.

One thing that I should tell you about I found fascinating. At the casino at Niagara Falls there was a young slot technician that had worked there for a couple of years, and he had to maintain the machines. One day he announced to the casino manager that he wanted to turn himself in because he had taken \$185,000 out of the coin-in, coin-out machines. The casino management and the law enforcement and the police that are in the casinos there were absolutely taken aback. To this day they cannot figure out how he did it. They do know he has sold his technique worldwide, but he turned himself in. One of the things that concerned these gentlemen greatly was that with all the new technology, with all the new product line that's available, this could well be the beginning of a new wave of sophisticated crime, one that's very hard to detect, because today they are still trying to figure out how this young fellow did it.

Globally another thing that they're working on – and they do have courses in this as well – is Internet gaming. They believe that global on-line gaming will be a \$7 billion industry within the next two years. Here again, it is very, very difficult to track down in some areas what is going on that's legal, what is going on that's illegal, and they have one unit that works exclusively in that end.

Along with this report, I spent some time with a very, very fine gentleman from Alberta by the name of Sergeant Bob MacDonald, who basically works for K Division, RCMP. Sergeant Bob MacDonald, as far as law enforcement goes, is probably the most knowledgeable individual in this province. In fact, he spends considerable time yearly with Detective Inspector Larry Moodie, and they correspond and dialogue back and forth. Sergeant Bob MacDonald's position is with the RCMP, and about one-fifth of his position is dedicated to criminal activity related to gaming. Under the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, special operations, these are the people that enforce the regulations in Alberta. These are good people. They're multitalented.

I guess the one problem I have is that the responsibilities of these inspectors go far beyond gaming issues. They also go to liquor, tobacco, and fuel. They are good at what they do, but with the changes in technology and the criminals becoming much more sophisticated, both Sergeant Bob MacDonald and I are very, very worried. We hope that Alberta is not an accident looking for a place to happen. We would think it would be better, certainly with the increase we've seen over the last few years in gaming and casinos, if some of these inspectors were dedicated to the one function, which has to do with gaming, and were trained accordingly.

The third thing that I found interesting. Though I know that certainly AADAC is doing an excellent, excellent job and are contracting out to other organizations and are provided yearly with the required amount of money they ask for, one thing that Ontario does is tie their disbursement for addiction programs to the dollars generated, the overall revenue. So if the revenues go up, the dollars

allocated to prevention and addiction also go up, because their theory is that if there are more dollars in revenue, obviously it means that more people are gambling, and more than likely there are more people with problems. So I thought that was interesting.

4:20

As well, as we move ahead in the next few years and probably see an expansion of gaming in Alberta, it is important that we look at another fact. It's mandatory in Ontario to make the casinos and the stakeholders, those involved in providing gaming and gaming product, take some responsibility for prevention and for prevention training courses and intervention training courses for staff. That's just a point to ponder.

Part of my recommendations, as a couple of members have suggested – I am not saying that we need to scrap everything in Alberta and look again. This report, which basically was an internal report, was meant to just point out some of the things that experts in some of these areas in other provinces were telling me. I don't think we need to reinvent the wheel to look at some areas. I think Alberta has been a leader in gaming. We were the first to utilize a gaming secretariat two or three years ago and the first to distribute lottery funds directly to communities and allow municipal taxpayers a say on VLTs. Because of what happened in Alberta with the municipality involvement, with public participation on VLTs, the province of Ontario does not have VLTs.

I would like to see us remain at the forefront. Something else has been said: each and every jurisdiction in Canada has gambling. Gambling, gaming, and betting are not going to go away. We have to continue as a province to ensure that good policy is put in place, that we respect those that possibly end up having a problem because of their involvement. We have to look at the industry's operation and management. I think that we need in this province to work with other jurisdictions so that we can learn and they, too, can learn from us as to what works and doesn't work.

I would like to see Alberta lead the way in this and try to have some type of national roundtable of various jurisdictions across Canada where they in fact could learn from each other. I know that a lot of provinces do talk back and forth. I know that a lot of them would like to just talk about small things that work, things that don't work, where they're going to, how they're going to deal with the expansion of gaming, the expansion of technology, and the expansion of computerization.

Also, the one thing I would like to see us look very seriously at is more of the law enforcement in Alberta having the knowledge and expertise to deal with the criminal side of operations. Criminals don't care what kind of casino it is. They just know it's a casino. There are a lot of things that can take place in that environment, and I think we need a police presence in our casinos as they get bigger.

One thing I have to say is that a great deal of the bill before this House is a result of this report that I did. One thing I didn't say, and I don't want to leave people with the impression that I did. It was not a recommendation of mine for a standing committee on gaming that would involve the entire Assembly. That is obviously a direction from the Leader of the Opposition and the caucus.

I am proud of this report. This report to date has gone out to over 200 individuals and jurisdictions all over Canada and North America. I've had a great deal of feedback from it. As a direct result of my time in Ontario, I do periodically hear from some of the people that I met in Ontario, and we do compare notes.

Anyway, I just want to clarify some of those things. I thank you for your indulgence.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd start off by saying

that I think the Member for Lacombe-Stettler should indeed take it as a compliment that the work she had done and the report she had done now is reflected, at least in part, and was clearly a good part of the genesis of Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, and I salute the work she's done on that.

She and I haven't always been of one mind on this. I remember that shortly after being elected, it seems to me perhaps in 1994, there were a series of hearings that were taking place. It was in the early years, anyway, of my time here, in '94-95, and there was a set of hearings in which the Member for Lacombe-Stettler was involved. I remember they announced where they were going to sit and how long, and I remember they were coming to Calgary. I don't remember precisely, but it was for a very short time, and my office was hearing from a lot of people who wanted to make representations. So I remember that what I had done, along with my colleagues from Calgary-West and Calgary-North West, was rented a room at Fort Calgary and had invited people who had not been able to make submissions, Mr. Speaker, to be able to book a time with the government-sponsored committee, whatever it was called at the time, that there were three Liberal opposition MLAs who were interested in hearing their comments.

A good part of our motivation was in hoping that the government would then extend the number of days of hearing time in Calgary. I'm delighted to report that by the time that people finally came to see us, we must have spent I think one day and I'll bet we met with over 20 different organizations that had come forward with concerns. By the time they came to meet with myself and my then two colleagues, I think the government had then formally committed to having some additional days of hearings in Calgary, so I suppose our little exercise achieved what I had hoped it would.

I think certainly it's been since at least that time that the Member for Lacombe-Stettler has been involved in the issue and has acquired a kind of expertise that I'd expect nobody in the Assembly could come close to matching. In fact, I'd start off by quoting a comment that appears in the report entitled *Gaming in Review* from December 1998. The quote appears on page 39, and it is this:

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!

That was a quote from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

I think I agree with that. I am certainly no gaming expert. In fact, I have learned more about gaming and gambling in this province since I became an MLA in 1992 than I ever expected to. I was one of those Albertans who always figured that I work too darn hard for my money to enjoy gambling very much. Well, you know, I have relatives who find this is the greatest form of entertainment, and I respect that everybody is entitled to find their entertainment where they will.

I guess what has staggered me in my time as an MLA is the growth of this industry. I mean, I still have difficulty understanding it. I think it's over \$700 million we see in the budget coming in every year for the last couple of years.

MR. STRANG: You've got to go to Vegas.

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, Vegas is not my favourite place to visit, although I understand lots of my constituents probably enjoy going there. It's too hot to play tennis, so that wouldn't be my idea of a vacation.

Mr. Speaker, the thing that I find so staggering is the dollars involved. My experience on this, frankly, has been talking to community groups who are interested in the funding arrangements and the impact it has on what efforts they make to try and raise

funds, whether it's for a figure skating club or some kind of an organization in Calgary, and also looking at it from the point of view of people who have had gambling problems.

My constituency office, Mr. Speaker – you may not know this – is in the same building as AADAC. One of the things that's been also a real education for me – people are often in for some of the various excellent programs provided by AADAC, and they may take the time to stop in to see the local MLA or to register a concern. So through that kind of chance encounter I think I've been able to understand dimensions of the problem, the gaming problem, at least on a very local basis, far beyond what I would have anticipated before I first got elected as an MLA.

4:30

Anyway, my point is that, as the Member for Lacombe-Stettler and the Leader of the Opposition and my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford said, gaming and gambling have become just a huge component in terms of this province, in terms of the way people live. This has a huge impact on sort of the cultural, social, recreational life. It certainly has a big impact on the provincial treasury.

I remember in 1994 running for the leadership of the provincial Liberal Party and going around with Adam Germain, who was an MLA for Fort McMurray. He had a great line that he used repeatedly. I don't remember all of it, but it was talking about where this government had taken us. It was something like: a liquor store on every corner; a VLT machine on every corner. He went through this litany of things, and you know, what struck me at the time – I mean, he was always, as you'll recall, Mr. Speaker, one of the most entertaining speakers that we've heard in the Assembly. But there was such an element of truth to that, and we've watched this proliferation of gaming opportunities in our communities. They come right into the neighbourhood pub, and they seem to be everywhere.

When the provincial government talked about where we were going to cap the number of VLT machines, they set what seemed to be an awfully high limit. Then we saw some plateauing of VLT machines and then a move into slot machines. All of this I think happened without what one might say would be a really strong public mandate. I think, from the VLT referendum we saw just a couple of years ago, it's an issue that has engaged Albertans like few other things we've dealt with in the Assembly.

In any event, my inclination is to support Bill 208. I think it goes some places where we have to go. I've certainly not had the benefit of studying in any detail what's happened in Ontario and to understand the full dimension of the problems here, but there are a couple of things I look for. One is some independence of governance of gaming from the government of the day, the opportunity to build some expertise. That's why I support section 5 and the notion of creating an Alberta gaming secretariat.

I think there's some real value – and indeed we've seen that with AADAC, for example. Part of AADAC's strength is that at least there's some degree of independence, maybe not a lot, from government, but there's an opportunity to develop some tremendous expertise in terms of problems in that particular area.

I think the notion of setting up a gaming secretariat to do the things identified in the proposed section 42.01(2), including advising “the Minister on matters relating to gaming” and “to foster awareness and to encourage public discussion on matters relating to” gaming addiction, organized crime and gaming, effects of gaming on children and families – I mean, those are all important issues, things that have to be properly addressed. As I look at it, I wish that the gaming secretariat were reporting to the Legislative Assembly and not just to a minister, because I think that's too limiting. I'm always

nervous about appointing a government member to one of these things. I'm not persuaded that there are advantages to that in every case.

Here the suggestion is that you'd have an opposition member as well as a government member. Reasonable men and women may disagree on that, but I think the point is clearly that you would have representation from the general public and from other people who would have expertise in the area. I think that's particularly positive. With the notion of the secretariat there's a requirement in terms of the minimum number of times it must meet, and I think that's very positive.

The one matter that I know the Member for Lacombe-Stettler said that she had not recommended – and she was very clear on that – would be the proposed section 6, the standing committee on gaming. But it seems to me that that committee would provide for a degree of oversight. It would involve the Legislative Assembly in an appropriate way in terms of what's going on, how those processes are being handled and managed, and I think that would be a very positive thing.

If you go through the functions of the standing committee, one of the most important ones is holding public hearings, public meetings. Why is that important? Well, I just suggest that we all go back, in our not so distant memories, to the VLT referendum. I remember going to numerous functions in Calgary and hearing people like Jim Gray and some of the people who provide leadership around that. I remember Mr. Gray one time speaking to a group called the Knights of the Round Table in Calgary. It's a group of business-people, retired judges, newspaper editors, thoughtful people who come together a couple of times a month to talk about issues of public concern. Mr. Gray came and made a presentation, and I remember that one of the themes of his presentation was that, you know, Albertans didn't really vote for this.

I mean, this huge expansion of gaming in this province was never something that was the product of widespread input and consultation. It's interesting that a government that has spent so long consulting on so many other things – you know, there was no consultation when they rolled out the VLT machines in the first place, and then we saw this enormous expansion of VLT machines. That really was, you might view it, an executive decision. One would think that if we were going to do something that would have such a dramatic impact on the fabric of our families and our communities, you'd want to ensure a broader kind of consultation before you went down that road.

Now, Mr. Speaker, next to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, you're probably the next best thing to an expert in this Assembly in terms of gaming. You've got a long and detailed history in terms of dealing with the very subject matter of this bill. You know, I regret that we lose your voice when we're dealing with this bill, because I expect that you'd have a lot of very important experiences to share with us and perspective and insight. It's one of those times that because you're in the chair and not able to participate in the debate, we regret that. We regret not having that expertise. In the meantime what we're going to have to do is that those of us who are not so knowledgeable are going to have to speak to this bill and react from our own experiences and our own notions and our own views of this.

4:40

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to hear any compelling argument why we would be better off not to have an Alberta gaming secretariat. If there are those reasons, I hope somebody will tell me, and I think we can deal with those. There seem to be the two key elements: one, having the gaming secretariat, and then the second one, having the standing committee on gaming. I think the secretariat is the key part.

Mr. Speaker, I haven't discussed this with the Minister of Gaming – and he may have some very different views on it – but it seems to me that sometimes when you have a department that has some financial imperative, has some government sorts of imperative, they end up being too narrowly focused, so what happens is there isn't the kind of independence sometimes required to view some of these serious problems. I know we have here in the Assembly – I'm glad, and I hope we're going to see participation in the debate – the Legislature's one voice and member on AADAC. I know that colleague is here in the Assembly and probably could tell us a lot in terms of some of the issues that AADAC deals with in terms of problem gambling. Some of those people I talked about I see come into my office while they're waiting for some of the programs that AADAC offers at 11th Street and 11th Avenue in Calgary.

I think it's sometimes good to set up a degree of healthy tension between perhaps an organization such as an Alberta gaming secretariat and a provincial government and a provincial minister. I think it's good for ministers to be challenged, and I don't mean in a hostile way by a crowd on the street outside the minister's office. I mean by thoughtful people who spend time to develop expertise in an area and who then go to a minister who has the legislative responsibility, the ministerial responsibility and perhaps sort of challenge that minister to do some things that aren't being adequately addressed. The opposition tries as best we can for a few weeks in March when we're dealing with the provincial government budget. We're never sure whether the ministers take any of the advice they get from the opposition, but you know, we make that effort.

There are lots of people who aren't represented in this Assembly who have important things to say about gaming, and I don't think those voices routinely get to be heard. I think if you had a secretariat, the secretariat may end up challenging the Minister of Gaming to do better. It may be able to point out things where the government is letting the people of this province down. To me that would be a very worthwhile sort of experience.

The minister still ultimately controls the purse. The report comes to the minister and recommendations. The notion I like is that with the recommendations that come to the minister, the minister is required to put the recommendations before the Legislative Assembly, so you can see how this kind of constructive tension would be created. You would have a gaming secretariat that would have a modest degree of independence from the government of the day and would be able to formulate recommendations after broad-based public consultation. I mean, it's not dissimilar to the way AADAC works now. What would happen then is that those recommendations would come forward and be shared with the minister. As a courtesy the minister would see them first, but within three days a copy of those recommendations then would come before the Legislative Assembly, so it becomes a public document.

I want to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for having the wisdom to anticipate that sometimes the Legislature doesn't sit in Alberta – actually that's more often the norm – and in that case the report then would have to be made public. That just makes excellent sense to me, that the report is not going to be buried away and is not something the minister would be able sit on for weeks or months, arguing that it still required some fine-tuning or whatever. The report is out there, and Albertans can read it and can deal with it.

Now, the other point I think I wanted to make – well, I'll have to make it at the committee stage. Hopefully the bill will get that far.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today to speak to Bill 208, the Gaming and Liquor Amendment Act, proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. This bill seeks to revamp our existing procedures that relate to the administration of the gaming industry. It proposes to do that by forming a gaming secretariat and an all-party committee on gaming.

I'm not supporting this bill, Mr. Speaker, because it simply adds more layers and is redundant to our existing regulatory system of gaming. Our government has already laid down a framework for administering gaming in this province. That framework is one that includes extensive research, fair and impartial administration, and treatment of problem gambling.

As chair of the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission, I have some direct experience with an important function of the regulatory framework. I've had the opportunity to meet and work with outstanding experts and people who are part of an even greater organization. Each year AADAC handles more than 30,000 treatment admissions and 70,000 shelter admissions. In addition, more than 600,000 brochures and pamphlets are distributed to Albertans. I believe public information is one of the most important functions of AADAC. It is relevant to Bill 208 because public information is part of the mandate of the proposed gaming secretariat. I would suggest that AADAC is currently doing a commendable job in that regard, and problem gambling has certainly been part of those efforts.

It was 1994 when problem gambling was added to AADAC's mandate. Gambling has become a priority for the organization. A major part of that mandate and one that is also reflected in Bill 208 is the function of research. In 1998 AADAC completed a report on adult gambling and problem gambling in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, the findings of the report offer some interesting insights into gambling in Alberta. I'd like to point out that gambling has been in relative decline in recent years. The report indicates that this may be due to the awareness there is in our society about the problems related to gambling. There's also an indication that those experiencing gambling addiction often have exposure to gambling early in life. That means that preventing gambling addiction begins with the parents. AADAC endeavours to reach out to those parents and make them aware of issues relating to gambling.

AADAC has adopted a holistic approach to problem gambling. By recognizing that gambling problems often go hand in hand with drugs such as alcohol, AADAC is better able to treat the problem.

AADAC's research initiatives also help us to determine exactly what the extent of problem gambling is in Alberta. The 1998 study shows us that of the people who gamble in the province, 2 percent are pathological gamblers, the most severe category of gambling addiction. The good news is that between 1994 and 1998 there was an overall decrease in the number of problem and pathological gamblers in Alberta. While there is a decrease in problem gambling in the province, Albertans still love gaming. Nearly 83 percent of Albertans enjoy gambling activities of some kind, whether that is going to a fully licensed casino, the horse tracks in Edmonton or Calgary, or the bingo halls that are all over this province. However, in 1998 there were 23,000 fewer problem gamblers in the province than there were in 1994.

Mr. Speaker, gambling addiction can be devastating to those problem gamblers and their families. We all know that. But what we have found at AADAC is that problem gambling is treatable and it is preventable, given timely information and interventions. Our research indicates that when people are made aware of the warning signs, they are able to take control of their lives and avoid the pitfalls of problem gambling.

Mr. Speaker, AADAC is doing an exemplary job, I believe, of spreading awareness about the risks of gambling and researching the causes and effects. That's why I feel that Bill 208 should be defeated in this House. Organizations such as AADAC already meet the objectives put forward in Bill 208.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

MRS. SLOAN: Just a few brief comments this afternoon on Bill 208, Mr. Speaker. I think this bill's intentions are sound, and they certainly offer a contribution to taking this province to the next step, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

I particularly like the Alberta gaming secretariat. We have had in the province in the past quite a number of reviews undertaken on critical issues. Just in a few short minutes I'd identify the MLA review on WCB, and we've had an MLA review on maintenance enforcement, child welfare, and children at risk. It would seem to me that in an area like gambling there needs to be an ongoing mechanism to monitor the perhaps positive and negative effects of such activity.

Under the purpose of the secretariat there are specifically highlighted a number of areas including the effects of gaming on children and families. We're in the process of reviewing our child welfare caseload at the moment. We have no idea of how many children in that caseload are there in part or wholly because of the fact that their parents are gamblers and have not been able to provide the basic necessities of life. It's these types of things, Mr. Speaker, that I think would be worth while pursuing.

We also do not have statistical information before us that talks about the number of suicides that arise in the province because of gambling addictions, yet in my own professional and personal circle I know of a provincial bureaucrat who committed suicide over gambling, and this year right here in the city of Edmonton within our Edmonton minor hockey association we lost a member who also committed suicide over gambling debts. So I have had at least two exposures to that, and I think the problem is much more systemic than those two examples suggest. But if you look at the statistics relative to deaths that are compiled by the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research, at least last year's didn't categorize gambling as a cause of death, and I think there should be perhaps a subcategory created that identifies that. If we don't start to do those things, Mr. Speaker, we're not really going to get to the root of the problem.

I respect the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler's comments relative to crime. I think that is an area where we've seen the province set up a whole strategic task force and unit to deal with Hell's Angels. We know Hell's Angels is linked to illegal gambling, gaming activities. But in a widespread context, why not have something like this secretariat that can monitor, anticipate, and plan for the development of criminal activity in this area?

I'm pleased this afternoon to support Bill 208, and I would anticipate there will be many other members of the Assembly that would do the same. I think there have been some reservations named about the standing committee, and certainly I see within the recommendations and functions of that committee some very worthwhile requirements. As an example, "the introduction of a policy requiring a proportion of revenues from the Commission . . . be used to support police services in preventing and fighting organized crime," and "the economic, social, regulatory, enforcement and addictive implications of Internet gaming." Internet gambling crime is predicted to increase substantially. Why not get ahead of that, Mr. Speaker, on a policy and planning standpoint? Why not have a committee that would be able to do that on a

consecutive basis without being subject to turnover such as the roving committees that have been struck in the last little while to deal with other issues?

With those comments, I'm pleased to take my seat and again to voice my support for Bill 208.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to all of the Members of the Legislative Assembly who have spoken about this bill. I thank government members and members of the opposition who have added their perspective and their interest on this issue. I particularly appreciated the remarks by the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, whose work of course led to the excellent gaming review report on which Bill 208 has been based.

I think we know full well that this is an issue that needs to be addressed in Alberta, and some of the recommendations that are key to this legislation that were contained in the Member for Lacombe-Stettler's report are very important issues that need to be addressed. I know several of the members have said that they feel that what is being suggested in this bill is already covered by AADAC. As someone who has been a very strong supporter of AADAC's work in our province, I wish that were the case. In fact, I think AADAC is having difficulty struggling with alcohol and drug abuse issues, let alone gambling addictions, which of course take on the very same characteristics of any addiction.

This is not just a bill about addressing the issues of addiction, Mr. Speaker. This bill is also about issues of crime involved in gaming, of municipalities who see gaming establishments within their boundaries who have attempted to control those and have no mechanism by which that can happen. This bill answers some of those concerns. I also think it's important to say, particularly in closing the debate, that I certainly hope members of the government, as well as others, will carefully consider supporting this legislation.

It's certainly put forward on the basis of us as legislators collectively building on the need to address the issues of gaming that have become so prevalent in Alberta as well as in other provinces. The gaming secretariat, of course, is an opportunity to rise above any kind of partisan political debate and build a framework where legislators can start to enter into this discussion in order that we can provide the kind of control and the kind of leadership that I think Albertans expect from this Legislature.

By pulling together MLAs, one from the government and one from the Official Opposition, members of the general public, a representative of the RCMP, of the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, of AADAC, and of the Child and Family Services Secretariat, we would begin to address some of the very complex problems that arise out of gaming, which go far beyond just addiction, and certainly touch on, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview so eloquently has stated and in fact has worked on, the issues affecting children and families. The opportunity for reviewing legislation through a filter of its impact on children and the things that we think

are very important in terms of where we head in the future as a province are embodied within this suggested legislation.

5:00

Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Lacombe-Stettler indicated, the next frontier in gambling in this province is clearly going to be that on the Internet. Gambling on-line is a huge issue, and I think we need to come together as legislators to find a solution to that. Bill 208 is an opportunity for us to work together to do that.

There is no question, Mr. Speaker, that some form of legislative framework is needed to address this issue within our province. I'm hoping that members of the government will exercise their belief in finding a better solution and support the legislation. If the legislation comes forward in a different form or a different auspice but embodies these recommendations from the Member for Lacombe-Stettler's report, we will certainly work to support that.

I do think it's an issue that needs to be addressed, and I look forward to hearing how members feel about it.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:02]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Dickson	MacDonald	Sapers
Leibovici	Nicol	Sloan
MacBeth		

Against the motion:

Amery	Hancock	O'Neill
Broda	Havelock	Paszkowski
Calahasen	Hlady	Pham
Cao	Jacques	Renner
Cardinal	Johnson	Severtson
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Doerksen	Kryczka	Stelmach
Ducharme	Langevin	Stevens
Dunford	Lougheed	Strang
Evans	Lund	Tannas
Fischer	Mar	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Marz	Taylor
Friedel	McFarland	Woloshyn
Fritz	Nelson	Zwozdesky
Haley		

Totals:	For - 7	Against - 43
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[Motion for second reading of Bill 208 lost]

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:16 p.m.]