

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, May 17, 2000**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 00/05/17

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Dear God, author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Thy guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all our judgments. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition on behalf of Albertans from the following communities: Calmar, Stony Plain, St. Albert, Edmonton, Legal, Fort McMurray, Leduc, Lac La Biche, Calgary, De Winton, Okotoks, and Rocky Mountain House. The citizens are concerned. They write:

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.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted to be able to present to the Assembly this afternoon a petition signed by 94 Albertans residing in Calgary and Edmonton. These 94 Albertans petition the Assembly "to urge the government to stop promoting private health care and undermining public health care."

Thank you very much.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and present a petition signed by 120 Calgarians who are asking the Assembly "to urge the government to use its legislative powers to help resolve the labour disputes at the Calgary Herald."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

MR. GIBBONS: I'd ask that the petition with respect to public health care that I presented yesterday from Edmonton-Manning, Edmonton-Clareview, and Edmonton-Norwood be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

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

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

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

THE CLERK:

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to pass a Bill banning

private for-profit hospitals in Alberta so that the integrity of the public, universal health care system may be maintained.

We the undersigned residents of the province of Alberta hereby petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta not to institute a flat tax because:

- it will unfairly shift the tax load from high-income earners onto middle-income Albertans;
- it will deepen the divisions between rich and poor in Alberta society; and
- it will do nothing to simplify the tax system.

head: Notices of Motions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm giving oral notice today of a motion to stop the opposition filibuster on a significant tax cut for Albertans. The motion reads: "Be it resolved that debate on second reading of Bill 18, Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, shall not be further adjourned."

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table five copies of the Alberta government's mission report from my participation in last year's Team Canada mission to Japan and my subsequent visit to China.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I would like to table today the required copies of Dr. Robert Shapiro's report titled Why Fairness Matters: Progressive Versus Flat Taxes. It amazes me that the Liberals always refer to this report in antagonism to the single-rate tax. After reading this report, it follows three tests that we used: increased simplicity, increased economic growth, and increased equity, and it meets all those tests.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like also to table a news release from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, a federation that looks at all taxes across Canada. It's headed up by saying: Klein's Tax Cuts a Boon to Middle-Class; Bill 18 Critics Out to Lunch.

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

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, in Shapiro's paper his conclusion is progressivity wins. But that's okay.

I would like to table the appropriate number of copies to the hon. Member from Calgary-Egmont from Mr. Kim Cassady in which Mr. Cassady calls upon the Member for Calgary-Egmont to apologize for his mischaracterization of the work that he did when he was an employee of Alberta Treasury. Mr. Speaker, I'm certain a similar letter will come to the Provincial Treasurer if he keeps this up.

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling a document that I would suggest is required reading for every Canadian legislator. It's the annual report for 1999-2000 that was released yesterday by Mr. Bruce Phillips, the Canadian Privacy Commissioner, with some terrific commentary on Bill 40 and a host of other provincial government initiatives.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a letter and a comprehensive review of the Genesis Spray Lakes area development done by Robin White. As a result of this review, Robin is totally opposed to the project.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of the program for a very significant event that occurred right here on the Legislature Grounds this morning. It was a statue unveiling ceremony of Lord Strathcona by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've got three tablings, three documents. The first is a note from *Ontario Hansard*, Finance Committee's Pre-Budget Hearings, February 1, 2000, where Mr. Ernie Eves gives reasons why a flat tax is the route that they want to reject in favour of progressivity.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Alison Longson of Calgary expressing concern over the Genesis Land Corporation proposal for Spray Lakes.

The third is an e-mail letter from Trevor Nickel of Sherwood Park, and it's critical of the government's health care policy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure this afternoon to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Allan Shenfield, who is seated in your gallery this afternoon.

Mr. Shenfield was first appointed as returning officer for the electoral division of Stony Plain in 1973 and has served in that position for six consecutive elections. He has also been the municipal returning officer for Parkland county for 35 years. Mr. Shenfield initiated a farm family award in this province, and he is an honorary life director for the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies. He is also very active in the 4-H movement and has been inducted into the 4-H Hall of Fame. The Shenfield Civic Centre in Spruce Grove is named after Allan for his contribution to the community. He has served on numerous provincial and local boards and committees, and he resides within the Hon. Stan Woloshyn's constituency of Stony Plain. Stan would have had lunch with him today, but he was welcoming the Governor General at the Provincial Museum at noon.

Today Allan is accompanied by our Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Brian Fjeldheim. I would like to ask them both to please rise and receive a warm welcome from the Assembly.

1:40

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions this afternoon. First, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly 35 individuals from Idylwyld elementary school. The group visiting

today is comprised of three adults, including Mrs. Cooper, the teacher, accompanied by Miss Sauer and Mrs. Voaklander. The 32 students who are visiting today are in one of the schools that has in combination with another school from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's constituency the concept of sharing a principal. They are visiting the Legislative Assembly as part of their course. They're in the public gallery. I would now ask that they rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, my second introduction to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly this afternoon is of two individuals that I'm proud to represent in this Assembly. They are Al and Edna Sempovich. They are constituents, of course, of Edmonton-Gold Bar. They are very active not only in their retirement years, but they were owners of a grocery store, the Gold Bar IGA in Edmonton-Gold Bar. I would now ask them to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly 23 grade 5 and 6 students from Rutherford school in my constituency. They are accompanied by Mrs. Kathleen Maser, their teacher, and by Mrs. Patricia Hage and Mrs. Joan Popp. I had the pleasure of reading to this group several months ago, and I found these students very, very attentive and able listeners. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Leduc.

MR. KLAPSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 18 visitors from the Round Hill school. They are seated in the members' gallery. The group includes teachers Mrs. Maxine Sych and Mr. Dan Adrian. I would ask the Assembly to extend to them a traditional warm welcome.

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

MRS. GORDON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you 52 bright, enthusiastic young students from the Lacombe Christian school in Lacombe in my constituency. Accompanying the students are teachers Mr. VanDoesburg and Miss Vande Kraats, with parent helpers Mrs. Ekkel, Mrs. Steeneveld, Mrs. Vanderwekken, Mrs. Stikker-Breemhaar, Mrs. Brink, Mrs. Vink, Mrs. Kamps, Mrs. Weenink, Mrs. Schakel, and Mrs. Dereg. They're seated in both galleries. I would ask the students if they would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you a group of students that will be here between 2 and 2:30. I would like people to know that I have 34 visitors from Millgrove school in Spruce Grove. They are with their teachers, Mrs. Pat O'Callaghan and Mrs. Deb Schellenberger, and parent helpers Mrs. Donna Fillion and Mrs. Susan Park. They've had a wonderful tour, and they will see us later in the Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to

introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Legislature a young student from John Paul II school in Stony Plain. She was here today on a job shadow, and part of her responsibilities was to help me welcome Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson to the Provincial Museum to view the Lord Strathcona regiment exhibit at the museum. I'd now ask Katlin-Kit Haley to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you today a constituent of mine but also a true friend of the city of Lethbridge and of course a true friend of the Member for Lethbridge-East and myself. We would like to introduce Mayor David Carpenter, city of Lethbridge. I believe he's in the public gallery.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The St. Albert Kinsmen Rainmaker Rodeo is coming to town, and today the Kinsmen had the media kickoff. We have two members, Kinsman Greg Amyotte and K-40 member Bill Hite. They are seated in the members' gallery. I would ask them 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.

### Medical Diagnostic Services

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the first time in Alberta's history people will be able to jump the queue by paying for a CAT scan at the Meadowlark MRI centre. CAT or CT scans are used in diagnosing cancer, tumors, osteoporosis, and heart disease. In their letter to doctors advertising their new services, which I'm pleased to table, the private operators advertise that pricing is structured to promote affordability:

Brain	\$200
Spine	\$300
Body or Chest	\$325.

Visa, MasterCard welcome. My questions are to the Premier. Given that Albertans can wait for up to three months for a CAT scan in the public system but can pay out-of-pocket to have one done the next day at the Meadowlark MRI centre, can the Premier please explain the reason for the queue-jumping that he's allowing?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, this is hardly queue-jumping. I think it applies to all diagnostic services, as it relates to MRIs, as it relates to CAT scans. If something is prescribed by a physician and is deemed to be medically necessary, that person will get the necessary diagnosis, whether it be a CAT scan or an MRI or an X ray or whatever other diagnostic procedure is required. If a person is perfectly healthy and says to a group of diagnostic experts, technicians, and physicians, "Lookit; I just want to come in and get my head checked out or my leg or my arm," then why would the system pay for it? Why would the system pay for it if there's nothing medically wrong. They would have the public pay for a procedure that is not medically necessary.

If the leader of the Liberal opposition wants any further clarification, I'll have the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness respond.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Premier would like to explain for someone awaiting a brain scan, a CT scan, why they have to wait as long as they do and that it's not medically necessary.

You know, this is the little health care insurance card. Can the Premier . . .

THE SPEAKER: I recognized the hon. leader for a question.

MRS. MacBETH: Okay. Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why an Alberta health care insurance card is now not fully covering medically necessary CT and MRI scans?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, if it isn't right now, I'm really quite surprised, because if it's medically necessary and it's prescribed by a doctor, then it is covered.

1:50

I know that anytime I've had an X ray or when I had pneumonia some years ago and it was prescribed, I had the CAT scan. You know, this was before I was the Premier, just to make sure that there was no preference, but it was necessary because I had very serious pneumonia, and I got a CAT scan. It was medically prescribed.

Again, I'll have the hon. minister supplement.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, certainly this diagnostic technique is covered, is paid for by Alberta health care. The health card works for medically required diagnostic services.

I would also like to remind the members across the way that through our specific announcement with respect to a major, major expansion of MRI capacity in this province along with very significant dollars that we have put into purchasing additional equipment, we are responding to the need for additional diagnostic equipment across this province.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a patient receives a medically necessary service in the private sector, why do they now have to take their Visa or their Interac card along with them?

MR. KLEIN: That statement is totally, absolutely false, untrue, fraudulent, and misleading. Mr. Speaker, this is what the Liberals have been up to all along. I will explain one more time to the people of this province. No use explaining to the Liberals because they either don't know, won't understand, refuse to understand, or are intent on continuing with their malicious campaign of misinformation. To all Albertans: all you need for any medically necessary and required diagnostic procedure is your Alberta health care card.

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

### Protection of Privacy

MRS. MacBETH: We'll send him the bills, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's Privacy Commissioner in his latest report is very critical of the creation of a data profile by the federal government department of Human Resources Development Canada. This appears to fly in the face of past promises to Canadians that government would not gather and organize different kinds of information about citizens without their knowledge and without their consent. My questions are to the Premier. Does this province

provide personal information to the federal government about Albertans without their consent?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, before I answer, the leader of the Liberal opposition said that she'll send me the bill. Well, I challenge her that if she goes in for a diagnostic service that is medically prescribed and she sends the bill, I'll tell you that that is something I'll be taking up with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. So I challenge her. If she has a medically required procedure and it's prescribed, then I challenge her to send me the bill. She won't, because there won't be a bill.

Relative to the question, which by the way is a good question, as a matter of fact I was going to ask the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs whether or not we are required to be part of that insidious federal Liberal government scheme.

THE SPEAKER: I take it now that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs is supplementing the answer?

MR. KLEIN: Yes.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, the freedom of information and privacy bill is one that has been debated and discussed at some length. As a matter of fact, all parties were part of the process, the discussion and the development of this particular bill.

I think it's important that in the discussion and development of this bill there were some exceptions, there were some rules that indeed allowed for exceptions for releasing information. I think it's critical that we understand that mandatory exceptions prevent the release of information that would harm the business interests of third parties. There is a mandatory exception that stops the release of personal information that would cause an unreasonable invasion of personal privacy. Mandatory exceptions protect cabinet deliberations where the policy is still in the formative stage. This discretionary exception protects advice from officials. Indeed, discretionary exceptions recognize legal privilege and protect confidentially between lawyers and their clients.

These were all exceptions that were put in place with approval and agreement actually. The Liberals agreed with this, so I find it strange that if there were any consequential discussions regarding this, the Liberals find difficulty with this overall process.

MRS. MacBETH: So I take it that the answer is yes, it does provide information to the federal government.

Mr. Speaker, what conditions has this government put on the pass-through of information from Alberta to the federal government on things like student loans, social assistance, and maintenance enforcement? What conditions?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, here is a good question. It's a discussion I wanted to have with the hon. minister. Maybe he has the answer now, and I'll ask him to reply.

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, I've laid out the exceptions. Indeed, we need to know the exact details of what it is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is voicing, but we do have the exceptions and other than those exceptions information is of course made accessible. I've laid out the details of the exceptions. If it's the pleasure of the House for me to repeat them, I will do that. But unless it fits under the exceptions of this particular area, that information is available.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, this minister is the custodian of that

personal information. How will this minister assure Albertans that their personal information will not be used without their consent?

MR. PASZKOWSKI: Mr. Speaker, it's important to recognize that we abide by the legislation, the legislation that was built in this House, and ultimately it was at the agreement of all of the participants in this Legislature that this legislation was developed. Consequently, it is our fullest intention to abide by the legislation as it was presented unless there are amendments, and if there are amendments to this legislation, then there will be changes made.

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

### Homelessness

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The book *No Fixed Address* profiles the deplorable condition of the homeless in Calgary. People in Calgary are living in shanties built in public parks with no food and are eating by trapping wildlife and pets. Calgary is a tragic tale of two cities in one, for the prosperous and for the poor. My questions are to the Premier. Given that this government claims to have a policy on homelessness, what is this policy doing to put the Calgary homeless into homes and food in their stomachs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, in society there are those who fall through the cracks. That is unfortunate. I'm sure that if the Calgary Homeless Foundation and all of the wonderful agencies that are working to accommodate the homeless in Calgary were made aware of the situation, they would certainly be there to help.

I think it's shameful, quite frankly it's disgraceful that the leader of the Liberal opposition would allude to the situation and the efforts that are being made in Calgary in such a derogatory way, Mr. Speaker. This is probably one of the most aggressive municipalities in the country relative to addressing the needs and the plight of the homeless.

The Calgary Homeless Foundation, as I understand it, was one of the first agencies and might still be one of the first agencies of its kind to co-ordinate all of the activities of the homeless in Calgary. They've got In from the Cold, where I understand that something like 53 churches now have opened their church basements to accommodate those on an overnight stay, and they're fed a good breakfast and a good lunch. As well, we have agencies like the Mustard Seed society. We have agencies like the Calgary Drop-In Centre, Mr. Speaker.

2:00

There are numerous agencies doing a wonderful job to address the needs of the homeless in the city of Calgary, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure that those agencies, along with the Calgary Homeless Foundation, are now looking at the situation to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, *No Fixed Address* is a fund-raising project of the Calgary Drop-In Centre. The question is: what is the government doing? What funds is the government giving to commit to the very critical shortage of housing for the homeless in Calgary?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Minister of Community Development respond, but I can tell you that the Calgary Homeless Foundation got off the ground with a very substantial amount of seed money from the government of the province of Alberta. I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it's important to point out that there are the homeless ones which our policy addresses. There's also another category of homeless which are in transition from not being able to have a roof over their head immediately to being able to have, if you will, some ongoing shelter.

With respect to the homeless situation in Calgary there are currently meetings going on between the provincial government, the federal government, the city government, and about 100 agencies within that to address the plan in a concerted effort. This is not a new knee-jerk reaction. It has been going on.

I might add, Mr. Speaker, that both in Edmonton and in Calgary throughout the past winter we monitored the situation very, very closely. There were not any people left out in the cold. Everybody was provided with shelter when needed. We'll continue to do so.

We will continue to work and to provide funds for the homeless both in Calgary and Edmonton and any other area of the province that so requires. However, we will do it with a concerted plan, not chucking money in every willy-nilly direction. We're going to ensure that it goes to where it goes.

AN HON. MEMBER: Where's your policy?

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Well, if you would read it, you would know what's in it.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, would the Premier agree that his government has compounded the homelessness issue by failing to provide adequate programs to address mental illness and people being discharged from mental institutions, addictions support through AADAC, and family violence issues?

MR. KLEIN: The answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, is no.

Since the leader of the Liberal opposition raised the issue, I will have the appropriate ministers respond as to what we are doing to address these situations.

MR. JONSON: First of all, very succinctly, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the mentally ill we have added significantly to the funding for community mental health services in Calgary. We have strengthened the crisis intervention capability and will be doing more work there. Action is being taken in that particular area of the member's question.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an excellent opportunity to address what the Alberta lottery fund does with respect to the questions from the Leader of the Opposition. In fact, if the member would go to [www.aglc.gov.ab.ca](http://www.aglc.gov.ab.ca), she would see that last year the Calgary Homeless Foundation received over \$2 million from the Alberta lottery fund. If you would look under Children's Services in the Alberta lottery fund, which is fully disclosed in the financial statement, you would see that in 2000-2001 the fetal alcohol initiative is \$1 million; 1999-2000, \$1 million; permanency planning for children in care, \$200,000.

Mr. Speaker, over 60 percent of the Alberta lottery fund is dictated towards health, education, and infrastructure. It's very clear that this government supports the initiatives that Albertans find important to them at the time they want to have the money to solve the issues that are in question.

THE SPEAKER: The Acting Provincial Treasurer.

DR. WEST: Yes, I'd like to supplement this too. Bill 18 brings in an increased personal exemption which will take many of the working poor off the tax rolls completely. Minimum wage earners in the province of Alberta, those working 2,000 hours a year or less, will pay no income tax in the province of Alberta, but they still have to pay federal tax.

THE SPEAKER: We'll have one more. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the homeless in Calgary but also here in Edmonton, I think it would be important for especially the opposition to be aware that we've actually upped it to \$10 million.

THE SPEAKER: A question was asked. A response has been recognized. The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment to sum up.

MR. DUNFORD: What we've done to address this issue, Mr. Speaker, is to up the funding for homelessness from our department to \$10 million this current fiscal year.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.  
The hon. leader of the third party.

### Income Tax

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whatever one thinks of the Mike Harris Tories in Ontario – and I'm definitely not a fan – at least when it comes to tax cutting, they are fair to all income groups, unlike the Tory government here in Alberta. I quote briefly from an *Ontario Hansard* document tabled earlier. In it Treasurer Ernie Eves explained why Ontario rejected a flat tax. He said, "It's not a very progressive way of taxing people. Obviously, those people who make more in society should pay more in terms of a higher rate." My questions are to the Premier. In developing its own personal income tax policy why doesn't the government of Alberta accept and emulate Mr. Eves' position that people who make more money should pay tax at a higher rate than people who make less money?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they do. It will always be that way, whether it's under a progressive tax system that promotes bracket creep – that's the most insidious way, that's where you start to absolutely pay an unfair share because of working hard and striving to earn more.

Mr. Speaker, a single-rate system still will require people in higher income brackets to pay more taxes. It's as simple as that.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the government justify imposing an unfair flat tax of 10.5 percent while their Ontario cousins are maintaining progressivity by bringing in five tax brackets ranging from six to 17 percent?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, after Bill 18 is passed and once the tax is implemented, I would be more than happy as the Premier of this province to stand up along with my colleagues and compare any day the personal taxes being paid across the board by the citizens of Alberta and the citizens of Ontario.

DR. WEST: Mr. Speaker, in Ontario with their five brackets the poor people are still paying taxes. We're going to take 190,000 off. This hon. member misleads Albertans by standing up and taking small snapshots of one tax plan versus another. The other day he said that a person making \$1.9 million was going to save \$70,000, but he forgot to tell the people that that individual pays \$773,000 in income tax.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [interjections] Now Albertans are finding out what this bill is about.

THE SPEAKER: The floor has been given to the hon. leader of the third party.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Is the government refusing to back away from its unfair and regressive flat tax policy because doing so would be politically damaging to the Reform Alliance leadership candidate endorsed by the Premier? If not, what other explanation could there be?

THE SPEAKER: Party politics doesn't come into the question period.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

## 2:10 Public-sector Workplace Stress

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent study of 1,500 people including 140 in Alberta found that 68 percent of Alberta's public-sector workers feel stressed, listing workload and the ability to meet their financial needs as the primary causes. My question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What is the minister going to do about this?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, we've received some information about the survey, but it's difficult for me to comment right now on its accuracy. The member in his preamble did point out that out of a survey of 1,500 with only 140 from Alberta – there really is quite a large margin of error in that kind of documentation. As I understand it, the margin of error would be in the order of 8 percent, so I suppose it's questionable.

The one thing, of course, that we don't know is: of the 140 people that were interviewed from Alberta, how many were actually public-sector workers? I understand that there are roughly 183,000 public-sector workers in Alberta. This, of course, includes federal, provincial, municipal, health care, education, and advanced education. I think we would need a number within that survey of more than a thousand before I start to knee-jerk to any results that are indicated.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: does the minister have any other studies that would refute or substantiate the findings of this study?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, it's always dangerous to get involved in dueling studies; I understand that. But we recently did a survey of 3,585 government workers, so we believe we have some statistical credibility with that type of survey. This was done last November and also again in January, and we were showing an employee satisfaction level of something like 80 percent. By the way, Mr.

Speaker, this was a dramatic increase from a survey of 1997. In fact, we went from a satisfaction level of 67 percent up to 80. The *Globe and Mail* recently reported on Edmonton-based PCL contractors as one of the best of 35 companies in Canada to work for, and their survey found again an 80 percent satisfaction level. So we have a pretty good track record, but we want to do better.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental to the same minister: would the minister please respond to the causes of stress in the workplace?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, I think the survey probably indicated some of those. Of course, we have workload; we have concerns about the relationship between work and family.

Mr. Speaker, if public-sector workers in Alberta are actually feeling more stressed, maybe it's because there's more going on in Alberta. We've talked at length in this Assembly about the Alberta advantage. We know that our economy leads the nation. We know that there are all kinds of people coming to our province. Of course, they're not bringing the roads with them; they're not bringing their hospitals and their schools. So I suspect there is a higher workload.

I noticed that a representative of the United Nurses of Alberta said that at least in their area people were dissatisfied with the incredible workload and the failure of things to change. Well, I would point out that Bill 11 was an attempt to do that.

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

## Income Tax

(continued)

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that this government loves to experiment rather than plan. First it was with health care, and now it's with tax collection. Can the Premier explain how the government knows there will be a benefit to Albertans from its planned flat tax when the real Treasurer admitted in answers to written questions to the opposition that there has been no study to confirm the spin-off benefits boasted in the 2000 budget?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is insulting the intelligence of many public service professionals who work in the department of Treasury, one of whom now works for the Liberal Party and was one of the authors of one of the reports that laid the foundation for the introduction of the single-rate tax system. There was a tremendous amount of work done on this particular proposal, which now is in the form of legislation, by literally hundreds of dedicated, educated, and committed public service employees in the department of Treasury. This hon. member should know all about that, because at one time she was the executive assistant to the Provincial Treasurer.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, how does the Premier explain the government's failure to study the impact of its tax plan as revealed in the answers to written questions 217, 218, 220, 226, 227, 231, and 232, which said that there was no information available? Is it arrogance, or is it indifference?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we do not try to confuse the issue with bafflegab like the Liberals. If the hon. member wants to know the

impact in simple terms, terms that even she can understand, I'll have the hon. Acting Provincial Treasurer explain.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, is the real reason the Premier has invoked closure on Bill 18 and Bill 19 because they can't defend their flat tax policy?

MR. KLEIN: Oh, no. Oh, no, Mr. Speaker. The media asked me if we can end the debate on this issue, and I indicated that we do indeed have the technology, and we're not afraid to use it in this particular case. Not afraid at all. No hesitation whatsoever. I think it is the right thing to do, to get 192,000 low-income Albertans off the provincial tax roll altogether, to give very, very significant tax breaks on a provincial basis to mid-income wage earners, to give tax breaks to seniors.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this province want to see that kind of legislation go through, and they don't want to see senseless filibustering by the Liberal Party to keep the money out of their pockets. They should be ashamed of themselves.

### **Speaker's Ruling Improper Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung. May I refer you please to *Beauchesne* 428(r): "A question . . . must not . . . refer to debate or answers to questions of the current Session."

The hon. Member for West Yellowhead, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

### **National Parks Policy**

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've been questioned by numerous tourism operators in Jasper national park about what is happening in the park with their industry on the ever changing policies. My first question is to the Minister of Economic Development. In light of the fact that the federal government has recently introduced a new National Parks Act which has many residents and business owners in my constituency concerned, what are the government's concerns with regards to this specific legislation called Bill C-27?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is concerned from two perspectives, the first being the content of the legislation itself and the second the manner of imposition of the legislation. I'd like to deal with the content, if I might.

The legislation itself creates a great deal of uncertainty not only for business owners but for residents within the parks by virtue of the fact that the legislation is significantly increasing the authority of the federal minister and the federal cabinet to, for example, terminate leases without due process or compensation.

2:20

We also have the issue regarding self-determination. For the past number of years there has been some movement on the part of the federal government to allow communities within the national parks to have some degree of autonomy and local government. Unfortunately, the legislation is taking a step back, and we're looking at there being some very significant restrictions in that regard.

Another issue for us is the lack of a balanced approach, Mr. Speaker. For us ecological integrity is very important, but what is also important for us is that there is access and use of those parks for

the taxpayer and for tourists. We don't see that balance being maintained.

Mr. Speaker, the national parks in Alberta comprise about 60 percent of the national parks in the country, and therefore for us it is a very important issue. In fact the majority of national park visitation takes place in Alberta.

So I guess to sum it up, it's a concern not only for this government; it's also a concern for tourism operators both nationally and within Alberta, for the residents living within those parks, and also for the general public at large. We feel there has not been meaningful consultation on this particular issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question: given that these are reasonable concerns, can the Minister of Economic Development please tell us what this government is doing to address its concerns with regards to Bill C-27?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. HAVELOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just indicated, this government believes in a balanced approach with respect to the national parks. That is why we recently adopted four principles pertaining to those parks. Those principles relate to the parks being affordable and accessible, not only again to Albertans but to Canadians and international visitors, also that the ecological vitality of those parks be maintained, that the parks continue to be the cornerstone of the tourism industry, which they are at this point in time, and, as I indicated earlier, that those Albertans living within the parks have some degree of self-determination.

Mr. Speaker, I have during the past month asked the federal minister, Ms Copps, repeatedly for meetings not only to discuss Bill C-27 but also to try and develop an approach which would facilitate meaningful input on this bill from not only Albertans but also the tourism sector and this government. We're also quite prepared to discuss opportunities to develop co-operative research on the impact that human use and access is having on the parks.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we recently had a federal/provincial/territorial meeting in Calgary on May 8 and 9. The national parks issue was discussed at length. In fact, I'm happy to say that the ministers from across the country unanimously endorsed Alberta's position with respect to the national parks. Really all we're trying to do at this point in time is get to the table and have some legitimate input and have an opportunity for input into what is happening in Ottawa with respect to the legislation.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental question: in light of what the Minister of Economic Development has told us, how will federal Bill C-27 impact tourism in the national parks?

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's going to have a very significant impact, and I'd like to briefly outline for the House how important the national parks are and tourism is generally to this province.

As many of you know, tourism is the fourth largest sector in this province. It generates approximately \$4 billion per year in revenues. We are attempting through the new economic strategy which was released by this government, entitled *Get Ready Alberta*, to see those revenues increase to \$6 billion by our centenary in 2005.

The mountain national parks themselves, Mr. Speaker, account for about 20 percent of our total tourism revenues. In fact, the expenditures by visitors to our national parks were about \$950 million in 1999, and when you add in the spin-off benefits to the rest of the province, they exceed one billion dollars. For the ski areas themselves this amount is about \$329 million.

Part of our strategy in working with the federal government is trying to promote the national parks as all-season parks. We're very concerned that some of the restrictions and regulations being proposed by the federal government will have a very significant impact on seasons beyond the traditional summer season.

So our concern, Mr. Speaker, is that while we want to, as I indicated earlier, maintain the ecological viability and vitality of those parks, we nevertheless have to recognize that there are businesses there, that there are people living there, that there are facilities there which people from not only Canada but throughout the world use and appreciate. So we're trying to again find that balanced approach to ensure that we do not unduly impact what is a very vibrant sector of our economy.

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

### **Medical Diagnostic Services** (continued)

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 12 of this year the Premier said:

I can guarantee you . . . if a doctor prescribes an MRI, that will be paid for by the publicly funded health care system whether it's in a hospital . . . or whether it's in a private clinic. It will be paid for if it is prescribed.

This afternoon we heard the Premier say that in fact he would pay for any MRIs that were performed in private clinics and that the Official Opposition should send him the bill. I have in front of me a letter from a Mrs. Hooper actually to the Member for St. Albert requesting \$475 from this government for her husband's MRI test. My questions are to the minister of health. Will he confirm the statements made by the Premier this afternoon and on April 12 that he will pay for that MRI?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I will certainly confirm that an MRI that is prescribed as being medically necessary, Mr. Speaker, will be provided and paid for through the publicly owned and operated MRIs, which I've mentioned we are expanding in number considerably, or in those cases where there is an MRI under contract to a regional health authority, it will be paid for there too. Physicians that I'm aware of do indicate that MRIs are required, and they do direct them to those publicly funded and supported sources.

MS LEIBOVICI: I'll ask the question again, Mr. Speaker. If a patient has a referral from a doctor in this province, will the Alberta health care insurance plan pay for a medically required MRI whether it is in the public sector or in one of the private clinics?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it's the same question, so I will give the same answer. I think that's probably appropriate.

The physician of course selects and recommends the proper diagnostic procedure, and if it is an MRI which is within a hospital setting, publicly owned, publicly operated, it will of course be paid for. If it is an MRI that is under contract to provide services to a regional health authority, it will certainly be paid for there too.

MS LEIBOVICI: As there are only two MRIs in this province that

are under contract with a regional health authority, is the minister of health now contradicting the Premier of this province, who said this afternoon as well as on April 12:

I can guarantee you . . . if a doctor prescribes an MRI, that will be paid for by the publicly funded health care system whether it's in a hospital or . . . in a private clinic.

The Premier put no conditions on that statement whatsoever.

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, I have outlined the situation. I think it parallels and is exactly what the Premier said.

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

### **Beverage Container Recycling**

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's beverage manufacturers, consumers, and retailers have shown great support and responsibility for beverage container recycling as evidenced by the success of container recycling programs throughout this province. The recycling system is user pay. Consumers are encouraged to return their containers through a deposit and refund system, but the actual cost of recycling is borne by manufacturers, retailers, and consumers. It is my understanding, however, that there is still an area where government and therefore all taxpayers are subsidizing the cost of bottle recycling. My question is to the Minister of Gaming. Can the minister indicate, if indeed his department continues to subsidize the cost of recycling liquor bottles?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. It's this kind of keen scrutiny of costs and spending by governments that would make this individual member an ideal candidate for the national presence, so you can see that there's certainly that kind of emphasis there. As a matter of fact, she would represent my constituency, so I would support her.

With respect to the question cost savings always continue in a good government. In fact, we continue to look at cost efficiencies, a continuous improvement program.

The member is absolutely correct. The AGLC is currently and has been for some time subsidizing the cost of recycling wine, spirit, cooler, and cider containers. As the previous Minister of Environment and the present Minister of Environment have done – they say that this in fact is not a correct practice, that in fact those who use the product should pay for the product. I think that's a reasonable philosophy to follow, and for that reason we are going to save 3.3 million Canadian dollars each year in changing this program.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister indicate if he has plans to end this taxpayer subsidy of bottle recycling and have liquor and wine bottle recycling paid for by those who sell and consume the product, as is the case with other beverage containers?

MR. SMITH: Well, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I mean, any taxpayer subsidies where taxpayer's subsidies don't belong has always been a watchword of this government, and it continues. In fact, we will announce today that this subsidy will end June 30 of this year. After that date, recycling costs for spirit, wine, cider, and cooler containers will be managed like beer and other beverage containers. The cost



of recycling the container will be included in the wholesale price of the product. This will save more than \$3 million per year for taxpayers and will ensure that those who manufacture and those who sell and consume alcohol products are paying the cost of recycling the containers as opposed to the cost being covered by taxpayers on a broad cycle base.

MRS. BURGNER: Mr. Speaker, my third question to the same minister. My constituents are very supportive of recycling. Can the minister please indicate how this change in policy can be expected to affect consumers?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact I grew up collecting bottles. It's something that I think young people across Alberta have done, I'm sure at Barrhead-Westlock. I know I started collecting bottles in Swan Hills. As a matter of fact, I was able to buy my first share of stock. This practice is going to continue in Alberta. Albertans will have the responsibility of being able to collect and return.

For example, the cost of what we used to know as a 26, 750 millilitres, will increase by about 6 cents, and the wholesale price of a plastic liquor container will increase by about 3 cents. Then it will be up to manufacturers, retailers, and those in the private sector, just as there are private liquor stores, to determine how the small increases in cost will be incorporated into the price of their products.

Pricing, marketing practices, business practices are not the issue of the regulator. The regulator regulates the substance.

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

### Long-term Care

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Broda report on long-term care was due to the minister in November of 1999. Almost half a year later we are still waiting for all its recommendations to be approved. In the meantime, seniors like those in Shepherd's Care Kensington Village wait for long-term care beds. My questions are to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Can the minister explain the delays in approving the requests for Shepherd's Care in having their temporarily funded 19 long-term care beds changed to permanent?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd just like to comment on the preamble to the member's question. We have certainly taken a number of initiatives with respect to long-term care and assisted living and the overall home care and aging in place initiatives that are outlined in the Broda report. The member across the way may recall that we committed significant capital dollars sometime ago, in this case to the Capital regional health authority, to enter into plans and arrangements for expanding long-term care capacity in this province. Prior to that, the Capital regional health authority had also received financial assistance in terms of opening about 200 beds in long-term care in the General hospital.

Now, with respect to the additional 200 beds that they are planning plus some assisted living accommodation in the Capital region, this was done through a process of requesting proposals, Mr. Speaker. It's my understanding that after looking over a number of excellent proposals, the Capital regional health authority has approved at least two or three projects, as I recall, and those projects are going ahead. There's a very significant follow-up on that aspect of the Broda report in the capital plan of Alberta Health and Wellness and the capital plan of the regional health authority here in Edmonton.

MR. WHITE: Mr. Speaker, in that the minister has answered all the questions as to capital needs of long-term care, I must remind the

minister that this is not capital. This is operating. These beds exist. I will ask the minister again: will the temporarily funded beds, the 19 beds that exist today, be funded permanently in the Shepherd's Care centre?

MR. JONSON: I would like to add to the member's question. As he well knows, the Capital regional health authority is in charge of administering long-term care within the region. They did receive a significant global increase in funding this year in their budget, and there was additional money targeted to the long-term care area. If I recall correctly, it was some 15 million or 20 millions of dollars across the province, which would work out to probably about \$6 million here in Edmonton. That goes into the operating base on top of the general increase in funding for the Capital region. I expect that as they have in the past, the Capital region will use that money wisely in the area intended. In terms of the specific allocations across their region, Mr. Speaker, that is something that is managed by the Capital health authority.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, sir. Given that the budget as outlined will not cover all of the current needs, how is the minister going to answer those seniors like the seniors in the Shepherd's Care centre now waiting for beds who are waiting for additional beds that are not available today?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, the answer is very simply that Alberta Health and Wellness on behalf of the provincial government and the people of Alberta is making very significant additional commitments of funds to the whole area of long-term care both in operational terms and in capital terms. We are following through on the majority of recommendations of the Broda report particularly as it applies to getting the needed long-term beds in place and also, as the Broda report recommends, promoting and fostering through support of home care and contracts the development and expansion of assisted living facilities. That is going, I think, very well. There are many projects under way there, and we're acting upon the need that is there.

### head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in a few seconds we'll call upon the first of seven members to participate in Recognitions today. Before that, I would just like to advise all members of the House that the applause and the recognition they gave a little earlier to a school group introduced by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert — they are now in the House.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

2:40

### 2000 Ship for World Youth

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the generosity of the government of Japan nine young Canadians will participate in the 2000 Ship for World Youth program. For two full months this fall 120 Japanese and 146 youths from 16 nations around the world will live together on the *Nippon Maru* as she sails through the Pacific Ocean. Sailing from Tokyo, its ports of call will include Vladivostok, Honolulu, Tahiti, Fiji, New Zealand, and Singapore.

The Ship for World Youth is sponsored by the Japanese government to promote international understanding and friendship between youths from Japan and around the world. On board the delegates

will attend seminars and lectures by Japanese university professors, and they will also have a chance to lead seminars on topics related to their own country. Young people from across Canada are now being recruited by the Canadian Federation of Students on behalf of the departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

I would like to thank the Japanese government for this wonderful opportunity for Canadian youth. Information about previous trips can be viewed on the Internet at [www.swytravels.com](http://www.swytravels.com). Applications must be received by June 16, and they are available at [www.swap.ca](http://www.swap.ca). This is a wonderful opportunity for our Alberta youth to consider.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I can't resist. I sincerely hope I'm not too old.  
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

#### **Al and Edna Sempovich**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to recognize Al and Edna Sempovich of Edmonton-Gold Bar this afternoon. Mr. Sempovich was born and raised in Alberta, and he and Edna have lived in Edmonton since 1960. Al was the owner/manager of Gold Bar IGA for 12 years. He was a scoutmaster of the 3rd Oilfield troop and is a lifetime member of the Leduc/Devon Oilfield Historical Society.

I would like to emphasize that Al and Edna are also vigorous supporters of a strong public health care system in this province. They have written letters to both the Prime Minister and the Premier and attended rallies and town hall meetings to fight the looming demise of our health care system. Al and Edna, who have three children, three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, are fighting not only for the future of everyone in the province regarding health care, but they're also fighting for the future of their own family.

I would like to recognize their efforts and commend them to all hon. members of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

#### **Calgary and District Heritage Fair**

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our country's heritage is one of our most important assets. It tells us who we are, where we came from, and what influences shaped our development as a nation. It ties one generation to another. It is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize the Calgary and District Heritage Fair, held last Saturday in Calgary. This fair was organized to help students in grades 4 to 9 learn more about their Canadian heritage.

Students participating in the event presented to a panel of judges an individual heritage project which was based on discovery and celebration of their ancestry, diversity, and culture. Judges included politicians from all levels of government, including many of my Calgary colleagues, as well as community members and heritage officials. I'm pleased to recognize the many volunteers who gave freely of their time and to acknowledge the many students who worked so hard to present such outstanding displays. They are to be congratulated for their efforts.

I encourage all members of this Assembly to participate in future heritage activities with their constituents and to recognize the strength that our heritage brings to this province and to our nation.

Thank you.

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

#### **One Child, Our Future**

MS OLSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today in the Legislature and recognize the efforts of Eastwood elementary school, the choir, and its remarkable principal, Linda Love-Walsh.

The Edmonton school district was looking for ways to commemorate the millennium, and Linda came up with the idea of writing a song for her students to sing. The song, called *One Child, Our Future*, talks about the fact that no matter what circumstances a child is born under, he or she has the potential to be a world leader. Linda says that's why all children need to be nurtured.

The music teacher at Kirkness school, Johan Brinkman, arranged the music, and a group of public school teachers formed a band called Men in Black and A Lady. The band along with the school choir will record a CD of the song next week, and the CD will go on sale at the school for a minimum price. This, Mr. Speaker, is an example of how hard our school professionals work, and I want to congratulate Linda, her colleagues, and her choir for a great job.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

#### **Fort McMurray Oil Barons**

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise as MLA for Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital of the world, and offer my congratulations to the Fort McMurray Oil Barons junior A hockey team on winning the Royal Bank Cup – in a storybook ending in front of thousands of hometown fans they defeated the Ontario Sabre Cats 2 to 1 – to the players, coaches, staff, directors, and 650 volunteers, corporate and local sponsors, the AJHL, and CHA. The Fort McMurray team truly does live up to our slogan. We do have the energy. Congratulations to all involved.

To conclude, as CFRN sports anchor Peter Loubardias appropriately said on national television: not only did Fort McMurray host a national championship; they won it.

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

#### **Riaz Choudhry**

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize a former city of Edmonton public servant and now a prominent businessman, Riaz Choudhry. Mr. Choudhry's personal integrity and his commitment to public service, professionalism, and primacy of public interest are exemplary.

He helped the Edmonton taxpayers save \$5 million when in July '91 he advised the city council and the media that a \$17 million sewer tunnel was not needed. The project was stopped but not before \$12 million had already been spent. Nevertheless, for blowing the whistle, he was fired from his job as a senior drainage engineer, embroiling him in a lengthy and costly legal battle with the city. As a result, Mr. Choudhry was forced to spend his time and thousands of dollars to clear his name. Recently Mr. Choudhry was finally vindicated in a settlement reached between him and the city of Edmonton.

I applaud Mr. Choudhry for his courage to speak out in support of the public interest and for faithfully serving Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **2001 World Championships in Athletics**

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton is the first

city in North America to host the World Championships in Athletics. The event is expected to bring more than 3,000 athletes, coaches, and officials from more than 200 countries to Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, to compete in 24 men's and 22 women's athletic events. Hundreds of thousands of spectators will watch the events live at Commonwealth Stadium.

I'm proud to say that running concurrently with the athletics competition will be the Festival of the Worlds, an arts and cultural celebration which will feature local, national, and international artists performing throughout the capital region.

As a board member of the 2001 World Championships in Athletics I'm very pleased to say that on May 14 young Canadian athletes competed in Calgary and joined hundreds of thousands of youngsters from over 150 countries competing for a chance to attend the eighth IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Edmonton on August 3 through 12, 2001. The fifth edition of this will bring youngsters together, and I'm pleased to say that this is the way that the IAA wants to encourage young amateur athletes.

Thank you.

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

#### **Point of Order Reflections on Nonmembers**

MR. SAPERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is the second time in as many days that I've had to rise on a similar point of order, and I'm rising under Standing Order 23, particularly 23(1), and also your ruling regarding referring to people outside the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, during question period the Premier, the leader of the government, mentioned without directly referencing him by name – certainly the implication was clear because he was speaking about a paper co-authored by Cassady, Ruggeri, and Van Wart, a paper titled *On the Classification and Interpretation of Global Progressivity Measures*, a paper which is now marked as sessional paper 957/2000. It was tabled by the Acting Provincial Treasurer yesterday. In referencing that paper and the work done by one of the three authors, Mr. Cassady, the Premier said that he, Mr. Cassady, “now works for the Liberal Party.”

Of course, this is the second time, as I've said, that a member of Executive Council has been requested to apologize and to be called to order for misrepresenting both the work and the deeds of Mr. Cassady, who of course is not a member of this Assembly and cannot defend himself.

2:50

Mr. Cassady – and you'll be particularly interested in this, Mr. Speaker – is an employee of the Legislative Assembly as he is employed working in my constituency office. He's not an employee of the Liberal Party in Alberta and, to the best of my knowledge, has never been an employee of the Liberal Party.

Yesterday the Speaker made a point of clarification when I was speaking to a government motion regarding the reappointment of the Auditor General and inadvertently said that the Auditor General was hired by the government. Of course, the Auditor General is a legislative officer, and the Speaker quite correctly straightened that out for me. I would expect that the same should happen here.

What was more troubling than the Premier's misrepresentation of Mr. Cassady and his place of employment was when the Minister of Government Services – and I've heard other members of Executive Council subsequently – then said, “Well, what's the difference?” as though it was the same thing to work for a political party in this

province and to work for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Certainly members of the Liberal Party and the Official Opposition don't confuse the two. We know, of course, that the government has pressed civil servants into service during campaigns. We've had that discussion before, Mr. Speaker, but we understand the distinction and think it's important. I expect that you would think it would be important, and I would ask you to call the Premier to order.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, hardly a point of order. I think the hon. member doth protest too much. Clearly, people who work within our constituency offices are employed by the Legislature and not employed by a political party. That's clear, and we appreciate that and certainly appreciate the clarification from the hon. member across the way as to what the exact employment status of the individual referred to is. It's clear as well, of course, that the people who support us in our constituency offices work for us as members and work to get our messages out to our constituents and to hear messages from our constituents, and to that extent they're not anywhere nearly as nonpartisan as perhaps an officer of the Legislature like the Auditor General might be.

But even that being the case, I had a brief discussion with the hon. Premier earlier this afternoon, and he's authorized me to say that if in any way the suggestion that the character of the individual referred to was besmirched or his integrity called into question by alleging that he worked for the Liberal Party, we sincerely apologize to that member for any acrimony that he might suffer publicly by having been associated with the Liberal Party in that context, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, hon. members, the chair believes he heard a withdrawal of the statement.

The statement itself. The hon. leader of the government said:

Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal opposition is insulting the intelligence of many public service professionals who work in the department of Treasury, one of whom now works for the Liberal Party and was one of the authors of one of the reports that laid the foundation for the introduction of the single-rate tax system.

Needless to say, it would be unknown to the chair whom these individuals were referring to, and now it seems that in this exchange that has happened.

Clearly, there was no attack or criticism of any individual with respect to that, and certainly care has now been given to indicate that the individual in question, whose name has now been identified, is under contract to the Legislative Assembly of the province of Alberta and as such must be nonpartisan. Must be nonpartisan. The chair would take great, great, great governance with hon. members if the chair, who happens to be the Speaker and the key administrator for the Legislative Assembly Office, were to find that employees in constituency offices were anything but nonpartisan. Great care should be taken by hon. members in ensuring that their employees are nonpartisan.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. 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 with the exception of written questions 21, 23, 24, and 25.

[Motion carried]

### Hospital Closures

Q21. Ms Leibovici moved that the following question be accepted.

How many hospital beds have been closed in the province from January 1, 1993, to January 1, 2000, how many nurses have lost their jobs due to those closures, and how many doctors have lost their jobs due to those closures?

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reason for this written question is very simple. We have over the last number of years heard conflicting figures as to what the number of hospital beds were in the province at a certain point in time and are right now. There has been much controversy around the fact that the amount of hospital beds per 1,000 population is insufficient to meet the needs.

In addition, we have heard much about there not being enough nurses and doctors available to provide services. One of the questions that has never really been answered by this government is: how many nurses directly lost their positions as a result of the closures that we saw in '93, '94, and over a period of time, actually, and how many of the doctors either lost their jobs or, perhaps, have left as a result of the closures and the disregard that this government has had for the health care professionals?

So that is some of the reasoning behind the written question, and I hope for a favourable response.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness I'm pleased to indicate that we'll accept the question.

In providing my own comments and not the minister's comments with respect to the acceptance of the question, I would be certain to assure Albertans and the members opposite that many hospital beds have been closed in this province not due to government cutbacks, as has been alleged over and over again by members of the opposition, but because of changes in health care service delivery.

I know from my experience as a member of the University of Alberta hospitals board that when we were moving many surgeries from inpatient surgeries and inpatient procedures, which sometimes required three, four, five, or six days of stay, to a day-surgery basis, wards were closed, and nurses were laid off as a result of that.

So just to put the question and answer into context, the Minister of Health and Wellness has indicated that he will be accepting the question and will provide the response requested, but one should not expect, then, the Liberal opposition to bring forward the numbers in the responses that are being given and to use that as a suggestion that that all happened as a result of changes in funding. Technology, changes in service delivery, changes in drugs, and many, many other things have impacted the health care system over the last 10 years.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

MR. DICKSON: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I wanted to speak. In fact, I had not intended to do so until I heard the provocative comments of the Government House Leader, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General. You know, if he thinks that the government of the province of Alberta, with which I completely disassociate myself, chopped those beds in the Calgary health region because of new technology, that is nonsense.

3:00

You know, it would do for all members to remember that the city

of Calgary, or Calgary region 4, has grown by 116,000 new people – 116,000 new people – since this government started closing hospitals.

MR. DOERKSEN: Good economic policy.

MR. DICKSON: No, but here's what we have. We now have, by the government's own numbers, 68 more acute care beds, they argue. In fact, if members look at the Calgary regional health authority business plan, 2000-2003, what you will find is that the region now claims that we have 1,816 staffed hospital beds. In 1994-1995 we had 1,748 staffed hospital beds. So we've got an increase, by my math, of 68 beds. If you looked at any statistics in terms of beds per 1,000 population, what you'd find is that in Calgary the bed supply is critically deficient. This is a sure rebuttal, I guess. If the Minister of Justice thinks that Albertans should not read anything, if they think this was all just a question of new technology and less invasive kinds of surgery that accounted for this, it's just not so.

In fact, while I'm speaking about the loss of hospital beds, members might also refer to page 32 in the same document. What you find referenced there is that we have 30 people on any given day waiting for access to acute care hospitals. We have 300 people in the community waiting for a bed. We've got 30 people in the community urgently requiring a long-term care bed. So, I mean, we have major concerns.

If you look at page 37 of the report, Mr. Speaker – and I'll be happy to table the report, but I assume the government has access to it because it's their stepchild, the CRHA. We talk about on page 37, and I quote: the extremely high occupancy rate in medical beds means that some medical patients are cared for in surgical beds. Close quote. It goes on to say: the utilization of improvement projects will help to move the number of postponements due to capacity problems towards zero by 2003.

So it's interesting that the CRHA doesn't have a lot of historical information. There's material there they don't like to talk about, so we simply talk about where things are now. I mean, the point is that by their own report we've got some serious problems in these areas. I think that a standard acute care hospital would have normally about 350 hospital beds, plus or minus. Then we lost the Grace hospital. We lost the Holy Cross in beautiful downtown Calgary-Buffalo.

MRS. NELSON: I was born there.

MR. DICKSON: My daughter was born there as well, Minister of Government Services.

Then, in fact, it seems to me that we lost – I think we had about 800; the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View would know better than I – 700 or 800 beds in the General hospital. [interjection] I think the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View is giving me some advice, but I can't hear all of it. She may want to participate in this discussion.

I think the point is this: we had three hospitals that closed, a substantial number of beds lost, this huge population growth. All in all, just a major problem. We need the statistics, Mr. Speaker, to get at the full dimensions of the problems. [interjections] I'm cautioned by members opposite that I will be talking us out of a positive response to the written question.

As I say again in my own defence, if the Minister of Justice had not made his observation, I would have been happy to move to the vote, but I wanted to clarify those comments and encourage all members, every member, to read the 2000-2003 business plan for the CRHA. The statistics in there are scary.

Thank you.

MRS. GORDON: I'm looking at this written question, and I find it rather strange that this question would be asked going back to January 1 of 1993. I concur with the remarks made by the Government House Leader that you cannot look independently at some of these questions without looking at health care totally. I think the Minister of Health and Wellness is very gracious in saying yes to you, because I don't know whether I would.

I think the question has to be asked: what happened to those nurses and doctors? Where are they today? I guarantee you that most of them are employed in very good jobs. I've yet to find a doctor that I could say is unemployed. I have never met a doctor that can tell me he's unemployed. So I don't really know what you want this information for. Again, we can talk about misinformation.

Going back to nurses, I want you to know that every month I hear from young nurses that are trying desperately to get involved in the profession. We have to think about going back to 1993, when nurses that had been in the system for a long time bumped younger, enthusiastic nurses. These young girls had to leave the profession, while the people that had been in it a long time stayed. Jobs were lost, and young people were not allowed to enter this profession.

So I think there's more than just this written question here. I have yet to see an unemployed doctor. I hope you could certainly tell me there are some, because any doctors I know are employed and very employable.

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

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister of Health and Wellness for providing the information. Quite frankly, to the Member for Lacombe-Stettler, whom I have a lot of respect for, it's not a matter of the minister being gracious in providing that information. This is public information that is the government's as well as the minister's duty to provide. It's not a matter of graciousness in terms of providing information that's being asked for.

The question with regards to doctors being unemployed was: how many have lost their jobs due to the closures that have occurred in the last seven years, particularly in the 1993 cutbacks, when the health care system sustained cuts of somewhere between, I think it was, 13 and 15 percent, whereas the hospital system itself sustained cuts of between 27 and 30 percent? So in actual fact you would have had some doctors having lost their jobs as a result of the so-called reform in the health care system.

The issue around bumping. Well, obviously there was going to be bumping occurring if nursing positions were lost in the thousands. The question is: how many nurses lost their jobs over the period of 1993 to January 1, 2000, as a result of the cutbacks originally? I agree with the Minister of Justice that, yes, some of the shifts in positions have been as a result of changes in technology and drug therapies, also a movement towards more outpatient facility care as opposed to inpatient facility care. The reality is that the positions were not in fact perhaps shifted so much as cut out of the system.

3:10

If I were to take the Member for Lacombe-Stettler's argument on the face of it, then it would belie everything that the minister of health has said with regards to shortages in our health care system and the fact that there are not enough doctors and not enough nurses in the system. So you can't have it both ways.

I do thank the Minister of Health and Wellness for the information and look forward to it in order to look at the trends. Numbers are very interesting and informative, so thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:11 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Bonner	Leibovici	Soetaert
Dickson	Nicol	White

Against the motion:

Amery	Havelock	O'Neill
Boutilier	Herard	Paszkowski
Broda	Hierath	Pham
Burgener	Hlady	Renner
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Day	Kryczka	Smith
Doerksen	Laing	Stelmach
Ducharme	Lund	Stevens
Forsyth	Magnus	Strang
Friedel	Marz	Tarchuk
Gordon	McClellan	Taylor
Graham	McFarland	Thurber
Haley	Melchin	Trynchy
Hancock	Nelson	Yankowsky

Totals:	For – 6	Against – 42
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[Written Question 21 lost]

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, having had experience as a Government House Leader, not experience as an Opposition House Leader, the chair can now look back fondly on those days and recognize the very tenuous position that the Government House Leader was always in. This clearly is a case today, where the hon. Government House Leader has moved acceptance of a question and there's been overwhelming rejection of the position taken. It is indeed a very tenuous position.

### Aboriginal Adoptions

Q23. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What is the number of aboriginal children who moved from permanent guardianship status to adoption in the fiscal year of 1998-99?

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

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with this government's openness and accountability, on behalf of the minister responsible for Children's Services the government will accept.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I normally would say nothing at this stage, but on the last written question we had the representative of the government stand up and say exactly the same thing, and then we saw his colleagues vote against it. [interjections] Well, I would have thought some clarification of why the thing was required would have been persuasive, not a deterrent to members to vote.

My colleague for Edmonton-Riverview had asked me, Mr. Speaker, to offer some explanation in terms of why the information is required, and because we cannot be sure that the representation

made by the minister in fact reflects the wishes of his colleagues, we are going to have to have some explanation in terms of why this is important.

The issue is one of "the number of aboriginal children . . . from permanent guardianship status to adoption in the fiscal year of 1998-1999." There had been a policy review report on aboriginal adoptions due in February of 1998. There had been, in fact, some excellent questions asked by Calgary-Glenmore in May of 1999 to, I think it was, the then minister of family and social services around the adoption process and then also some questions asked in the House on May 11, 1999, with respect to that. There has been work done in and around the First Nations children discussion paper on permanency planning, which was released in May of 1999.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

That's some of the background that my colleague for Edmonton-Riverview had asked me to impart to the Assembly. I wanted to make those observations, as she had asked me to do. So those are the comments I wanted to make on this Written Question 23.

Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:27 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Leibovici	Nicol
Dickson	Lund	Soetaert
Hancock	Marz	Trynchy
Havelock	McClellan	White

Against the motion:

Amery	Hierath	Renner
Broda	Hlady	Shariff
Burgener	Klapstein	Smith
Coutts	Kryczka	Stevens
Doerksen	Magnus	Strang
Ducharme	Melchin	Tarchuk
Forsyth	Nelson	Taylor
Friedel	O'Neill	Thurber
Graham	Paszkowski	Yankowsky
Haley	Pham	

Totals:	For – 12	Against – 29
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[Written Question 23 lost]

### Student Loan Defaults

Q24. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What is the breakdown of student loan default rates for each calendar year from January 1, 1993, to December 31, 1999, broken down according to learning institution?

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you. Madam Speaker, you know, I am one of great hope. Last week I had such luck with these written questions and written motions that I'm ever so hopeful today as I move the Member for Edmonton-Riverview's question, which I think is a very credible written question.

You know what? The only thing that concerns me in this question is that I heard the government whip from the other side say: I'm not going to give them anything today. But that would be petty and childish when we are talking about very credible questions from the Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

In fact, why shouldn't we be tracking performance records of student loans? Are there delinquent payments? Have we got trouble out there? What institutions have the biggest problems? Are banks having problems collecting, and are students having problems paying? This kind of information is something that would be appreciated by the Member for Edmonton-Riverview, especially since a great deal of the university activity belongs to her constituency. So I look forward to a positive response to this question.

Thank you.

3:40

MR. SMITH: I'm rising to speak against acceptance of the question, Madam Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I think you're just one moment premature there, hon. minister. We have to make a determination. Thank you.

MR. HANCOCK: With some trepidation about it, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Learning I would like to accept the question. Before there's any further debate from members opposite or from members on our side, perhaps I could indicate that I have the answers to the questions here and would be more than happy to table them on behalf of the Minister of Learning once the House has dealt with the question.

The only thing I would indicate in accepting the question is that the question asks for the "loan default rates for each calendar year from January 1, 1993, to December 31, 1999." Of course, the rates are based on school years rather than calendar years. It should be pointed out that you only get a default rate two years after a person has graduated, so there are no default rates for the '97-98 and '98-99 periods. But subject to those qualifications and not moving an amendment, because I think those are fairly clear, the Minister of Learning is prepared to accept the question and has provided me with the answers.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair would just want to mention, hon. House leader, that you should table that after the vote has been taken.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

MS LEIBOVICI: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's interesting that the House leader is indicating acceptance, yet at that same time the minister of lotteries has indicated that there is just the opposite opinion coming. So we know, given the history of the last two written questions that have come forward, that there is some kind of a game happening here right now. I'm not quite sure what it is, but the net effect of the game is that because of the petulance of the government members, in fact, one of their own members will not have the opportunity this afternoon to have his private member's bill debated. It is a shame that's going to occur, and I'm really heartbroken, because it's a really good bill in that that particular bill is one that I put forward in this Legislative Assembly in '93-94.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, we're dealing with Written Question 24.

MS LEIBOVICI: Absolutely. I'm just, you know, indicating how unfortunate it is that we won't be able to get to that private member's bill and all because of government members' petulance.

Now, this is a very, very good written question that the Member for Edmonton-Riverview has put forward, and because of all the turmoil that was occurring, I couldn't quite catch everything that the Government House Leader had indicated, but it sounds to me as if one of his reasons for not providing the information was because the default period will occur much later.

I am assuming, given what the minister of lotteries has indicated, that this will not be accepted, but one of the pieces of information that I think is quite useful for everyone is to see what has happened from the time when the banking institutions took over this particular program. That is the reason the question is being asked, specifically with regards to '97-98 to this point in time.

We know that the burden on university students is quite high with regards to student loans, and the default rates are something that would be of use to see what the impact of the student loan program right now is on students throughout this province.

So I am very hopeful, as the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert had indicated at the beginning of her request for this written question, that we will hear and receive the information. However, given the situation, the tone of this afternoon, it seems to be quite up in the air, Madam Speaker, as to what will and will not occur. So it's very important that the Official Opposition put their reasons out as to why in fact these written questions are very important for public information. It will be interesting to hear the minister's reasons for not providing this information to the public, and I'm looking forward to hearing those reasons with great anticipation.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Well, thank you so much, Madam Speaker. Usually when I hear questions or debates about ministrations of government, particularly from the Leader of the Opposition, I am not convinced, but when I hear the person who finished close to the top three in the leadership campaign, her articulate and persuasive arguments of why people should do this and why people should do that, I think they, of course, would have been much better served by making a different choice of a leader. If I were to have been so unfortunate as to have owned a Liberal membership during that time, I would have voted for that member, and I think it's important that that should go on record.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, I'd like to remind you, too, that we are dealing with a written question here.

MR. SMITH: With respect to Written Question 24, which is an important question, because I am very fortunate and privileged to represent the University of Calgary in the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. Because this is a party of free votes and because this is a party of individual opinion and because it's a party responsible to their constituents, I think it's important that I stand and speak against this question for the very reasons that the member put forward as to acceptance. In fact, it is these written questions that do waste the time of the House, that prevent private members from expressing their feelings.

If, in fact, they would have written a letter to the Minister of

Learning and just said, "You know what? We need this information. It's public information. Can you help us assemble it? Can we create a feeling of accord and bonhomie?" then we'd be able to do this. Instead, Madam Speaker, they take valuable, valuable time of the House. They put forward questions that are of a political bent, designed to ferret out information that is already a matter of public record.

In fact, as the Minister of Learning has pointed out very, very clearly, the issue in Alberta is a question not of tuition but of debt. When I look at my own personal experiences at the University of Calgary, which I'm fortunate enough to be a graduate of, my student loan bill in 1971 was equivalent to what starting salaries are today. So, in fact, they've done a good job in managing this.

In fact, the default rate is of concern. You know, banks handle the issue at 5 percent over prime. There have been a number of monetary discussions around this.

This evidence is clearly in the public record. The question is nothing more than vexatious, frivolous, and designed to waste the time of this House and this government, as the Liberals proved so very adept at in the filibustering of Bill 11, in the wasteful time of Bill 11 debate, and in fact now they're going forward in Bill 18.

Madam Speaker, I think we have no alternative, and I'm appealing to my members here, the people here, to reject this question and move forward to the private members' business of the day.

3:50

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, my comments will be brief, but I do want to support my colleague who just spoke. Frankly, I'm very disappointed in some comments that are coming from the other side, because I think the problem with the responses in these arises from the debate or the discussion, which shouldn't be a debate, or when the opposition are trying to make their case for acceptance. I think they can be made in a way that isn't provocative and that doesn't cause people to be inflamed by their discussions. When you talk about petulance and behaviour, I think a mirror would be in order for some of the members.

When you talk about the time that written questions such as this one, which is an important question, take away from private members' debate, I would remind members that a simple letter to a minister will afford that information. I can speak with, I think, some certainty in this area. I don't believe that a member from the opposite benches has ever requested information from my office in a dozen years and not received all of the information that I could possibly provide for them and as promptly as I could. I think that is a courteous way to behave towards members of the Legislature in this House, and maybe the opposition could take that into mind rather than having the opportunity to stand up and make what I thought were rather insulting comments.

I would want to accept this question because I think the information is important. However, I can't because of a procedural matter. One, I think that the member who asked this question with that much interest in the question should have understood that these are not calendar years. They are school years. Most people understand that a university student goes to school on a year, and if you've ever applied for a student loan or assisted one of your constituents with their application, which I think every one of us has, you understand that it is on a school year or a term that they're attending.

The second thing is that as there is not information for the latter part of it because, as most people do understand as well if they've ever had somebody associated with a student loan, default does not occur, cannot even occur till after two years, it is my view that this question possibly should have been amended. I would leave that to the better minds in this House. In my experience, questions that are

accepted in their form are accepted in totality, and if there is something that has to be changed in the question, it's done in the form of an amended question.

I think the Minister of Learning has offered the information in a good spirit, but because of the comments and the arguments I've made, I'm afraid I'll have to ask, maybe implore my colleagues not to accept this question.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm ever the hopeful one, because I always ask politely and nicely. [interjection] The minister said that he has the answers right there. You know, in rural Alberta we wouldn't call it a spitting contest, but it'd be darn close. I guess what this government wants – now, I've heard that different ministers reply promptly and give us all the information. You know what? Some do. Some do not.

AN HON. MEMBER: Name them.

MRS. SOETAERT: Be careful, because I may name them.

Interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, there are times when we don't get that information, so we go this legitimate, parliamentary route and ask these very legitimate questions. But unless we grovel nicely, oh, that great big government in the sky won't give us what we want. So you know what? We may be in a spitting contest this afternoon, which is very childish. It's very childish on their part. I'm very disappointed in a childish government who just, you know, can't give a decent answer to a very decent question. Very humbly, humbly groveling – no, I can't grovel to this government. I'm sorry; I can't.

MS LEIBOVICI: Nor will we be blackmailed.

MRS. SOETAERT: And you know what? I won't be blackmailed into groveling either.

This is a legitimate question. The minister is waving the answers, but you know what? He's going to table them anyway, because he's promised that to the Speaker. [interjections] Oh, yes, he did. It's in *Hansard*. But broken promises, well, we're used to that from this government.

Madam Speaker, I am so glad that they accepted this question, and I wait with great anticipation . . . [interjections] Oh, one person said that they'd accept, but the rest have now encouraged the others to not accept. So we are in a spitting contest. Isn't that childish? Well, I'm disappointed in a childish government. [interjections] Well, actually they're spitting between themselves, because some are saying, "I have the information, and I'm going to give it to you," and some say, "Don't give it to them." Well, those schoolyard days should be long gone in this Assembly, but they're not.

Madam Speaker, I'm sorry that the government is acting so childish today, but I am hopeful – I am a person of great hope – that we will get the answers to those questions, because the minister said that we would. I have faith in him once in a while.

Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Havelock	Nicol
Dickson	Leibovici	O'Neill
Doerksen	Lund	Soetaert
Ducharme	Marz	White
Hancock		

Against the motion:

Amery	Klapstein	Shariff
Burgener	Kryczka	Smith
Coutts	Magnus	Stevens
Forsyth	McClellan	Strang
Friedel	Melchin	Taylor
Graham	Nelson	Thurber
Haley	Paszkowski	Trynchy
Herard	Pham	Yankowsky
Hlady	Renner	

Totals:	For – 13	Against – 26
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[Written Question 24 lost]

### Aboriginal Adoptions

Q25. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mrs. Sloan that the following question be accepted.

What negotiations has the government been involved in regarding the status of aboriginal adoptions, and what reasons have been identified as a result of these negotiations for the lack of placements approved by aboriginal bands in the fiscal year 1999-2000?

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

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There are perhaps a number of observations I wanted to make, but I think I will wait until I see what response we get from the government first.

Thank you.

4:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I will call on a respondent, who's going to be the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I guess we'll take another try at this. On behalf of the Minister of Children's Services the government will accept this written question.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd just like members of this Assembly to know that this is really important information to me personally. I have four nieces and nephews who are of aboriginal descent, and they are part of our family because of adoption. So this is a huge issue for a lot of people, and I truly appreciate the information coming from the member.

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

MR. DICKSON: Well, you know, what I wanted to say firstly was that a minute ago I felt like it was my mother speaking to me. When we heard the minister of intergovernmental affairs, I felt like I was



sort of getting tuned up by my mother, but as always, it was done very nicely and done very gently.

The observation I wanted to make is this. We try and evaluate now, when a minister stands up, whether in fact he speaks for his caucus or for the other minister or only for himself. You know, I'd say to the minister of intergovernmental affairs that if you go back to the second question, Written Question 23, I thought I'd asked for it pretty nicely. I thought I'd avoided provocation, avoided hyperbole, avoided rhetoric, and I thought I'd made it clear. I'd undertaken to put some things on the record on behalf of a colleague, and I was discharging that responsibility. So I can only conclude that some of us have a reputation for being provocative, and when we stand in our place, regardless of what words we utter, the designation attaches.

But there's another important principle involved here, and it simply comes down to this, Madam Speaker. There may be members who think that when opposition people ask these questions, we're not respectful enough, not polite enough. You know, I think the point we sometimes miss is that it's Albertans who deserve the information. We're simply the agent for a lot of men and women and groups and sectors in this province.

MR. SMITH: You're not though.

MR. DICKSON: Well, we think there's an agency relationship, and we take that responsibility seriously. When we ask for information, for the most part it's because groups have raised it with us, and it's typically in response.

You know, the minister of intergovernmental affairs has set a stellar example for her colleagues in terms of her responsiveness.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Careful. They'll all hate me.

MR. DICKSON: Well, I don't want to besmirch your reputation, but I want to acknowledge that there are some government . . . [interjections] Well, in the next provincial general election I'll write a little endorsement on her election brochure: former Drumheller native says this is . . .

MRS. SOETAERT: Gary, control yourself.

MR. DICKSON: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm being reined in.

Anyway, the point I simply wanted to make, in as nonprovocative a fashion as I could possibly do it, is that Albertans often look for information. They don't always get it from departments. This is a forum to do it where you don't have to pay the \$25 FOIP application fee. You don't have to go through a 30-day process.

In our caucus – and I think I speak for my caucus when I say this – we think it's important that we should be able to make some comments in terms of supporting a written question or a motion for a return. We're now in the position, of course, where we can't take a minister as speaking for his caucus because we've seen on a number of these that the caucus votes one way and the minister represents a different course of conduct.

So those are the points I wanted to make with respect to the written question that's before us, Madam Speaker. I don't think I've been provocative, and I think I've been neutral. I'd fight to the death – if not to the death, at least to the end of the session – for the right to be able to make observations like that, and I think my colleagues would feel the same.

Thank you very much.

[Written Question 25 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 39, 47, and 50.

[Motion carried]

### Treasury Branches Report

M39. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the October 31, 1997, document prepared by or for Alberta Treasury entitled Alberta Treasury Branches: Process, Environmental Scan, Possible Government Objectives, and Alternative Business Outcomes.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, I'm responding on behalf of the Acting Treasurer, and it is with regret that we have to reject this motion. I don't think it is a big surprise to the opposition that this motion is being rejected, because it requests information that Treasury did not release under a freedom of information request on the grounds that it contained advice from officials and information that could cause commercial harm to Alberta Treasury Branches.

Further, it's to my surprise that the opposition is pursuing this when Treasury's position was upheld by the Information and Privacy Commissioner, an officer of this Assembly. Why would there be an expectation that this material would be available when it was rejected on those very sound grounds in the first place? Alberta Treasury Branch is an important financial institution in Alberta, and we certainly cannot risk their financial position simply to satisfy the curiosity of the opposition.

So it is with those comments, Madam Speaker, that I regret that we must reject this motion.

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

MR. DICKSON: Madam Speaker, I'm not sure. As I listened closely to the minister of intergovernmental affairs, it sounded to me like there were two different exceptions under the FOIP Act. She was talking about section 23 as advice from officials, and if that's the one she was referring to – and that's what it sounded like – that is a discretionary exception. What that means is that the department is not statutorily bound to withhold or forbear from responding to our request. The minister can say yea or nay, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs can confirm that section 23 is a discretionary exception, that it is not mandatory. What that means is simply this. It's not good enough and simply does not wash to say that because the FOIP Act wouldn't require the release, therefore we're not giving it.

MRS. McCLELLAN: Come on, Gary. I gave the reasons.

MR. DICKSON: Well, what we heard was first a mention of section 23. Now, if it's section 15, that wasn't mentioned, but it would be helpful if the minister would tell us specifically what the provision is, because I didn't see the original FOIP request and I don't remember the commissioner's order on this. Section 15 just talks about "disclosure harmful to business interests of a third party." Now, that's mandatory, and I don't know if that's the basis on which

the matter was provided. The matter might be this, though, that section 15 does not apply if the third party consents to the disclosure.

4:20

As Mr. Justice Cairns of the Court of Queen's Bench said in the inquiry that took place in the spring of 1996-97, if the third party consents to the disclosure, then section 15 doesn't apply. What that presupposes is that the department would go to the third party and would say: "We have got a request for information from the opposition. Do you consent or object to the release of the information?" If the third party said, "We object," then the government could reasonably – and I hope the Minister of Municipal Affairs will correct me if I misrepresent what the provision of the FOIP Act is. In that case, that would be the end of it. But I listened carefully and I did not hear the minister say that the third party was asked, pursuant to section 15(3)(a), whether they would consent to the disclosure and what the response was.

So here's what we're left with. I come back and say again that if within all of the elements of section 15 you can't bring yourself – the only other reason I heard was section 23. Section 23 is discretionary, so then the minister would somehow have to make the case that there's some compelling public reason why this wouldn't happen. I don't know what that compelling public reason would be, so I'm hoping the Minister of Municipal Affairs can clarify this, because it seems to me that there's a significant issue there.

I'd just address for a moment the public policy perspective. Why would we ask for this? Because there continues to be a great deal of concern, particularly in rural Alberta, in small communities around this province, in terms of the future of the Treasury Branches. There has been so much discussion. It may even be an issue in Calgary-Varsity. There has been so much discussion around this, and I think some of the source documents should be made available to Albertans. You know, too often they're not. So, Madam Speaker, we'd like some explanation in terms of why we couldn't access it.

That's the public policy reason. Those are the reasons why I think the FOIP Act would not apply. I think we need some further explanation, because on the face of it Albertans are being denied access to some information which I think (a) they're interested in and (b) they're entitled to have. I think before government withholds information, we should have a high threshold test.

I guess the other thing that I'd just say is . . .

MR. SMITH: Gary, we're rejecting it. Sit down. It's over. You're not going to win big. Let it go.

MR. DICKSON: You know, I don't remember the minister being as persuasive in the Tuxis and Older Boys Parliament in 1966. He may have been just as persuasive then, and I've just got a short memory and don't remember it. I marvel at the persuasive abilities he brings to the floor of the Assembly, but I'm just a particularly thick member and I don't always get the nuances. [interjections] But now I'm going to sit down because I'm getting some motherly advice, and I've finished saying what I was going to say.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: I'm sorry, hon. minister, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did close debate, so I can't recognize you. [interjections] Once he's closed debate, I have to now ask the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:25 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner  
Dickson

Nicol  
Soetaert

White

Against the motion:

Amery  
Boutilier  
Burgener  
Cao  
Coutts  
Doerksen  
Ducharme  
Fischer  
Forsyth  
Friedel  
Graham

Haley  
Hancock  
Havelock  
Herard  
Hlady  
Klapstein  
Lund  
Marz  
McClellan  
Melchin  
Nelson

O'Neill  
Paszowski  
Pham  
Renner  
Shariff  
Smith  
Stevens  
Strang  
Taylor  
Thurber  
Yankowsky

Totals:

For - 5

Against - 33

[Motion for a Return 39 lost]

#### Capital Planning by Government Departments

M47. Mr. Dickson moved on behalf of Mr. Sapers that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all reports, studies, and background documents prepared by or for Alberta Treasury for the period March 1, 1999, to April 13, 2000, concerning corporate capital plans developed by government departments.

MRS. MCCLELLAN: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the Acting Treasurer. Again, I don't think the opposition will be surprised that the government has to reject this motion. It requests information that Treasury did not release under a freedom of information request on the grounds that it contained cabinet and Treasury Board confidences, advice from officials, and information that could cause harm to a public body. Treasury's decision was not in this case appealed.

The corporate planning initiative resulted from a review, with assistance from the private sector, of how to strengthen the priority-setting process for infrastructure spending. The capital spending priorities of government departments are assessed using consistent criteria to ensure that available dollars are allocated appropriately. The final decisions by the government on capital priorities are reflected in the three-year business and budget plans that are published each year.

So, again, with regret we have to reject this motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo wish to conclude debate?

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm disappointed to hear it, but let me start off by saying that I appreciate the identification of the specific exceptions, because the minister has identified some mandatory exceptions and that's clarification we didn't have in one of the earlier ones. That's helpful.

Let me make this observation though. As the Premier said in that

memorable video he did when the FOIP Act first came out on October 1, 1995 – he did that voice-over thing to welcome Albertans to the new age of accessibility in the province. In that spirit I'd think that creative people in government would be able to take a request like this and say: yes, some of the information can't be disclosed because there are some prohibitions in the FOIP Act, but there's some of that information that can be taken out. I mean, if the specific document cannot be done, you could do a summary of the document. You could do a summary of the document that's not going to disclose deep, dark cabinet secrets.

4:40

I think there's a host of ways that creative men and women could find to be able to provide some of this information. If I were to see that, firstly I would be encouraged because it showed my government was creative, and it would show that they're trying as hard as they can to share information with Albertans.

The die is cast on Motion for a Return 47, but I make the observation and I guess extend the challenge to all cabinet ministers that it would be a wonderful and maybe a wondrous thing to see cabinet ministers say, "You know, we can't give you the specific document you've requested, but with a little imagination we think probably the kinds of materials, statistics, options you're looking for we can put together, and here's a summary," or whatever. I'm trying to remember the Harry Truman quote about doing the right thing, that half the people will be impressed and the other people would just be so astonished that they'd be speechless. I can't remember the rest of it. That might well happen, and after this afternoon maybe that would be a worthwhile result. The government might like to see a speechless opposition.

So I extend that challenge and hope that some cabinet ministers will choose to try and meet the challenge. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

For the motion:

Bonner	Nicol	White
Dickson	Soetaert	

Against the motion:

Amery	Hancock	O'Neill
Boutilier	Havelock	Paszkowski
Burgener	Herard	Pham
Cao	Hlady	Renner
Coutts	Klapstein	Shariff
Doerksen	Kryczka	Smith
Ducharme	Lund	Stevens
Fischer	Magnus	Strang
Forsyth	Marz	Taylor
Friedel	McClellan	Thurber
Graham	Nelson	Yankowsky
Haley		

Totals:	For – 5	Against – 34
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[Motion for a Return 47 lost]

### Maintenance Enforcement Program

M50. Mrs. Soetaert moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of any document for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of my colleague from Edmonton-Centre I would like to very persuasively move Motion for a Return 50. I know that everyone in this Assembly certainly deals with maintenance enforcement in their constituency offices, and the more efficient we can be, the better we serve many, many families in this province. So I am hoping for a positive response to that motion.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader as respondent.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would be pleased to accept the motion if it were amended and thus am moving an amendment that Motion for a Return 50 be amended by striking out "any document for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program" and substituting "the request for quotation for preparation of a business plan for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program." So the amended Motion for a Return 50 will read as follows:

... that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of the request for quotation for preparation of a business plan for the redevelopment of mainframe technology for the maintenance enforcement program.

Easy for me to say.

Basically, the member who sponsored the motion has been advised by my office of the proposed amendment. I'm not sure if she was also advised, though she should have been, of the reason for the amendment. The reason for the amendment is that the current mainframe technology is about 14 years old, I am advised. It's unlikely the program would be able to locate all documentation that dealt in any way with system redevelopment over the 14-year period. In addition, most of the documentation would not be helpful.

We're in the process, as I've responded in terms of previous requests relating to information on the maintenance enforcement program, of redeveloping the mainframe technology, with a target date of 2003. Preliminary to redevelopment, we've undertaken a review of the business processes. Currently available is the request for quotation for this review. The strategy to update the mainframe technology will be outlined in a document called maintenance enforcement program: business process review phase, which has not yet been completed but which was asked for by another name in an earlier written question. At that time I believe I indicated to the hon. member that when that document was ready, it would be made available.

The question in the format that it's asked would require research of a lot of old documents which wouldn't, in our view, be relevant to the information she is seeking. But we're more than happy to share the information relating to the development of the processes and improvement of the business technology and therefore at this time would be more than happy to provide copies of the documents which we believe are relevant. If that doesn't satisfy the question, I'd be more than happy to meet with the member or have her raise issues relating to what types of information she needs in that regard and see if we can provide it.

MR. DICKSON: You know, the minister cannot be faulted for his response. It was full, he gave us lots of information, and I believe he's trying to set this thing up, but I have to ask the question. On October 6, 1998, we had government responding to the MLA review on maintenance enforcement and access. I think it was the Member for Calgary-Lougheed who did some work on that, did an excellent report. We've got the response of October 6, 1998, and I take it that what the minister is saying – unfortunately, he has to carry the can for his predecessor. Maybe it's fortuitous that both of those gentlemen are in the Assembly.

If we look back to October 6, 1998, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and her group said and identified the need to review current communication technology and what had to be done. It's all set out in the report. Recommendations 36, 10, 11, 37, and 38 all relate to this. How can it be that in a period of 19 months we're only now doing a request for proposal? I mean, I thank the minister for giving us what he can provide, but for all of those people who phoned my office and I expect every MLA's office concerned about delays and inefficiencies with maintenance enforcement, how can it be that we're still fiddling with this now and are only at the request for proposal stage? One would hope, given the importance of the issue and the excellent report from Calgary-Lougheed, that we'd be a lot further down the road.

5:00

I know some of my colleagues share that concern. This is a huge issue with people trying to get the maintenance enforcement program working for them. In too many cases it is not, and now to find out that the only document that exists is a request for a quotation sounds to me like: what have we been doing? Surely it doesn't take 19 months to develop a request for a proposal; does it? So I think there's a heck of a lot of women in this province and children, for that matter, who have got a huge interest in this, and I think there has to be some further explanation in terms of why we're not further along.

I hope that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed is going to stand up and enter this debate and share some of her observations in terms of the importance. In that powerful report written by that review, there was some urgency – was there not? – around fixing some of these problems. In Calgary-Fish Creek I know there are people that want to see responses in terms of maintenance enforcement too.

Anyway, those are those questions I wanted to ask, and I hope we're going to get some answers to that, because so far we haven't heard an explanation around that.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MR. HAVELOCK: Well, it's unusual for me to respond to a cheap shot; nevertheless, I think I'm going to in this case, Madam Speaker. I know it's really out of character for me to do so, just as it's out of character for the hon. member to say such a thing. Nevertheless, I'm well aware of this issue. In fact, the hon. member, never having been in government, really doesn't appreciate that you advance projects on the basis of the resources that may be available at any particular given time. I know that my successor the Minister of Justice has been pushing this project forward, just as we pushed it forward as much as we could when I happened to occupy that position.

It shouldn't be surprising, though, to the hon. member that it does take a significant period of time to develop an RFP for something as complex as a new mainframe system. This is a challenge that government encounters all the time, because of course technology is advancing and changing so rapidly that you want to make sure you don't bring in something that, quite frankly, a year or two later happens to be out of date.

I guess what I'd also like to mention, though, is that the Member for Calgary-Lougheed did bring forward a very good report, and I can remember very specifically our government enacting a number of those recommendations quite quickly. The hon. member should be fully aware of that. So this one happened to be one that took a little bit longer and, again, I know that the hon. member meant nothing by the statement that he made, because he is usually honourable.

In any event, I felt compelled to at least respond to that, because I didn't feel it was entirely fair or warranted. Thank you.

DR. NICOL: Madam Speaker, just a question on the comments just made by the minister, in the sense that as I read the amendment, what they're providing is actually a copy of a request for quotation for preparation of a business plan, not even a request for a proposal for the redevelopment of the mainframe. So this is actually even one step earlier, further into the infancy of this project than what would appear by saying that it was a request for a quotation. Is that the actual document that you're planning to deliver, the request for quotation for preparation of a business plan? So you're just now starting to develop a program that would in essence put in place the definition of the needs for a computer system and the kind of process that would be undertaken to actually develop and implement the purchase, upgrade, and redevelopment of that mainframe. I would like to have that clarified.

Thank you.

MRS. NELSON: Well, Madam Speaker, let's be abundantly clear. When you're looking at a system redesign and one that is as large as this one, the project has to be scoped out well in advance before any kind of RFP process can take place.

We have gone into a process of co-ordination of technology development in this government, and we co-ordinate it now through one central area so we have compatibility between the various systems that are in place. It's very important to have a business plan on how we bring a critical path together for the scoping out of that technology. This amendment is clearly looking at the business plan relative to the mainframe for this particular project. [interjections] The minister was telling me about other things, but my focus is on the co-ordinated planning for the IT development for the government, and we all know that in the past that hasn't been the case. There's been incompatibility between systems, and that has to be put forward in a business plan. My colleague the Minister of Innovation and Science leads the department that does that co-ordination, and they're doing a fine job. That's part of the reorganization process that we went through last year when we reorganized government to make sure we do have that.

Now, insofar as the maintenance enforcement program that we know today, it has been upgraded and it has been improved upon, because as most of us know from the calls we've had in the office, there has been some satisfaction that has come through that system in doing some tracking. But quite clearly I would be very opposed if a minister came to the Treasury Board table that I sit at and asked for funds to do a project where there wasn't a full scoping out of the plan laid out on the table and a business planning process in place that would come forward. I would reject that as a member of Treasury Board because you're buying a pig in a poke, and I'd like to see the plan scoped out fully and a business planning process with a critical path attached to it before I would accept it at the Treasury Board table.

So I think the amendment that the hon. minister has put forward is very clear and is the right type of amendment to have. I would hope that the opposition would accept that.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Actually, they just confirmed what the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East asked: where are you at? They're only at the business plan stage. We're not even at the tendering process. We haven't got the technology up. You're still looking at a business plan to go forward on this.

So this is really, really backwards. It's quite a long while in the making, over 19 months just to say, "We're going to give you a business plan," which is fine. I'm glad the process is there, and they're going to take the proper steps so we don't end up with some technology like the Calgary regional health authority who just blew millions of dollars.

MR. BONNER: Fourteen, I think.

MRS. SOETAERT: Fourteen million dollars.

MRS. NELSON: Colleen, did you listen?

MRS. SOETAERT: I was listening to you. The reality is that you're at the business plan stage. That's great, but it's a long time in coming, especially when we realize how important this is to our constituents.

The former Minister of Justice said that it takes a long time and it's a matter of priorities and money. Well, I would venture to say that families and children should be a priority, and if this will help make their lives better and children avoid living in poverty in some cases and some families getting back on their feet, then I would venture to say that this should be a priority. I appreciate the amendment because you can only give us the information you have. I guess we assumed that you would be further along in the process, and you're not. So we will accept what you have.

You know, people wonder why we do these written questions. I bet now this might get the wheels turning a little faster, because they don't want to see this written question next time we sit in here: "What? You haven't gone any further than getting the business plan?" So I thank the minister for his ability to give the information that he does have, but hopefully the wheels will get turning and we can have a little bit more action on this.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion on amendment carried]

MR. DICKSON: Do I get a chance to speak on the amended motion?

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, you had the opportunity to rise, and you didn't.

MR. DICKSON: We voted on the amendment, with respect.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Now we do go back to the motion as amended.

MR. DICKSON: Thank you very much. All I wanted to do was

apologize to the minister of tourism, because when I made my reference earlier, I didn't know what the explanation was in terms of why there'd been no progress. I appreciate his candour in terms of telling us that it was a government decision and a resource allocation decision, and that's why they haven't moved on it. We didn't know that before. It's still a completely disappointing result, but I appreciate the clarification.

5:10

I didn't want to suggest in any way that the former Minister of Justice had done something untoward except that he was the minister at the time and the one with responsibility. In fact, it's ironic that he should be involved in the discussion this afternoon because of the very substantial role he played and the leadership he provided in the freedom of information and protection of privacy law we have in the province.

I want all of his 63 colleagues to know that when the fate of FOIP was hanging in the balance, it was the Member for Calgary-Shaw and now minister who was able to persuade the Premier's office that we had to follow the B.C. model. I gave a speech just last week, in fact, where I singled out the Member for Calgary-Shaw, the minister, as probably the father of the very act that the Minister of Municipal Affairs now has the pleasure of administering in the province. So I'm happy to have the chance to apologize to that minister and look forward to the vote on the amended motion.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Are you ready for the question?

MR. HANCOCK: Just a second.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The chair has asked for clarification. Unfortunately, you were the mover of the amendment, so you are not able to speak.

Does the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert wish to close the debate?

MRS. SOETAERT: No. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

[Motion for a Return 50 as amended carried]

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: I think, given the hectic pace of the afternoon, that it might be appropriate to ask for the House to consider calling it 5:30 and that when we reconvene at 8 p.m., we do so in committee.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Does the Assembly agree with the motion?

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? Carried.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:13 p.m.]

