

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Wednesday, November 22, 2000**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 00/11/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people we serve. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Visitors

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Elaine Dafoe, who is the mayor of the town of Turner Valley in the beautiful constituency of Highwood. Her Worship is seated in your gallery, and I would now ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. LANGEVIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests who are seated in your gallery. We have Mr. Scott Sutton, the Alberta Ombudsman, and he is accompanied today by his lovely wife, Betty-Jayne Sutton, and also a staff member, Dixie Watson. Mr. Sutton is here today to witness the tabling of his annual report. I would like to ask our three guests to please rise and be recognized by the Assembly.

head: Presenting Petitions

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have two petitions to present. The first one is signed by 150 constituents from Carstairs, Didsbury, Cremona, Huxley, Trochu, Three Hills and the Olds area, as well as Albertans from the Calgary area. It petitions

the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

The second one is signed by approximately 4,700 constituents from the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills area, and it petitions the Legislative Assembly

to urge the Government of Alberta to establish a hemodialysis satellite unit in the Olds/Didsbury area which could eliminate the need for patients of the area to commute to Calgary Foothills hospital three times a week for treatment.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition here signed by 15 people. They're in support of Bill 212, the human rights conscience legislation for health care workers.

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

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a petition of 33 names from the Calgary community, seven of whom reside in Calgary-Currie.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition on behalf of 20 constituents of Edmonton-Gold Bar to present to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon. These constituents are residents of Ottewell Lodge, and they are very concerned that there are no bathtubs in the new Ottewell place.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table six petitions containing 111 names from the Drayton Valley-Calmar constituency, 8 names from the Dunvegan constituency, 140 names from the Barrhead-Westlock constituency, 115 names from the Rocky Mountain House constituency, 94 names from the Calgary-Lougheed constituency, and 15 names from the Calgary-Mountain View constituency. The petitioners are urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Alberta human rights act to allow "health professionals to opt out of those . . . procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred."

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to present a petition signed by a number of concerned Albertans who are urging the government

to take an enlightened preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition signed by 215 individuals from the constituency of Redwater, and the petition reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

Thank you, sir.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to table this afternoon a petition signed by 246 Calgaryans in Calgary-Glenmore, Calgary-North West, and assorted parts of the city of Calgary urging the Assembly to urge the Calgary regional health authority "to reconsider the relocation of Unit 47 of the Foothills Hospital."

Thank you.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to present a petition to the Assembly signed by a number of Edmontonians, and it reads as follows:

To the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, in the Legislature Assembled:

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.

They keep on coming in, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 54 people, 18 being constituents from Calgary-West and 36 being Albertans from other constituencies, all of whom support Bill 212, the human rights conscience legislation for health care workers.

Thank you.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition I presented yesterday be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd request that the petition standing on the Order Paper under my name now be read and received. I believe there's more than one. You can do them all if you would, please.

Thank you.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce amendments to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act to allow Alberta health professionals to opt out of those medical procedures that offend a tenet of their religion, or their belief that human life is sacred.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to introduce legislation requiring a minimum of two people on shifts from dark to daylight.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on November 15 on osteoporosis and the Alberta drug list be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Alberta Government to take an enlightened

preventative approach and add the newer and more effective medications and therapies to the Alberta Drug List to ensure the health of an aging society.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request that the petition 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.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on November 15 be now read and received.

1:40

THE CLERK:

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

1. To immediately disallow any further development of the Spray Valley of Kananaskis Country, including those proposals currently under consideration;
2. To maintain Kananaskis Country in natural state that provides high quality wildlife habitat and nature-based recreational activities;
3. To create a Wildland Provincial Park which protects the whole of the undeveloped parts of the Kananaskis and Spray Valleys.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, may the petition that I presented November 15, 2000, against private health care be now read and received, please.

THE CLERK:

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

head: Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 27

Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2)

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2000 (No. 2).

It's a bill which changes two pieces of legislation: the Alberta Science, Research and Technology Authority Act and the ordinance to incorporate Alberta College. Mr. Speaker, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act is unlike other bills in that it has already been discussed by all parties and thus presumably would move through the House without too much debate.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 27 read a first time]

head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm tabling the requisite number of copies of an agreement that is entitled Energy Agreement Brings Benefits to Health and Education. This is something that will allow every school, hospital, public college, and technical institute in Alberta to benefit from stable prices, price discount, and consolidated billing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Science.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table two documents today, both associated with the Alberta science and technology leadership awards, affectionately known as ASTech. They have an event every fall that celebrates the leading science and technology people in the province, the people that are contributing to the new economy. We have some copies of the program, entitled Celebrating Innovation, and then I have a list of the winners that I'm tabling as well.

It's interesting to note that one of the winners is known as the Edmonton protocol. It's a group that is developing a cure for type 1 diabetes and is known around the world.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of the youth employment strategy brochure providing an update on youth employment strategy and part of this government's commitment to keeping Albertans informed about the strategy. This is a joint partnership of Alberta Learning and Alberta Human Resources and Employment and ensures that youth employment is looked at from the perspectives of youth in school and youth in the labour market.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have five tablings today. I'm also tabling the appropriate number of copies of each one. My first tabling is a letter from Arlene Chapman, provincial co-ordinator of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, who is opposing the Liberal Bill 211, the Alberta Taxpayer Bill of Rights. She is concerned that the bill will jeopardize stable, long-term funding for important social programs.

The second tabling is a letter from Shelley Williams, executive director of the Bissell Centre, who is opposed to the bill because the bill draws lines and divides people into camps.

The third tabling is a letter from Yvonne Schmitz, executive board member of the Calgary and District Labour Council, who believes the Liberals are feeding into the aggressive agenda of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

The fourth tabling is a letter from Brian Bechtel, the former executive director and would-be Liberal candidate in Edmonton-Norwood, who hopes that the bill is unsuccessful.

The last tabling, Mr. Speaker, is an editorial from the *Edmonton Journal* dated April 5, 2000, calling Bill 211 a Liberal "stupid tax stunt."

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four documents to table today. These are fact sheets prepared by the Graduate Students' Association of the University of Calgary. The first document is called The Crisis for Alberta Graduate Students, and this indicates

that many students are accessing the campus food bank, incurring debt loads over \$25,000, and finding it difficult to complete their degrees in time.

The second document, Mr. Speaker, is called Why Tuition is the Problem, and this document states that the underfunding of universities is responsible for unbearably high tuition levels and ever increasing tuition fees in the province.

The third document is called How Much It Would Cost, and it draws attention to the fact that for \$20 million the government could freeze the tuition fees of all postsecondary students in this province.

The last document, Mr. Speaker, that I'm tabling is called The Failure to Address Graduate Student Debt and draws attention to the grave consequences that students face as a result of very heavy debt loads.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table five copies of a document entitled HungerCount 2000: A Surplus of Hunger, Canada's annual survey of emergency food programs in association with the Canadian Association of Food Banks.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to table letters that I've received from 130 residents of Fort McMurray, or the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, who work in the service sector and are struggling with dealing with skyrocketing housing prices. They've received no satisfactory action from government on this matter, and I'm pleased as Leader of the Official Opposition to place their concerns on the public record on their behalf.

MR. SAPERS: Mr. Speaker, I have four separate tablings this afternoon. The first is a letter from Manfred Lohka of Calgary addressed to the Premier and copied to myself as well as some other members. It is a very eloquent plea for more funding for universities and particularly notes the importance of basic research.

Mr. Speaker, the second tabling is actually two separate documents from the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation. The ACT For High School CPR training program was launched today in the city of Edmonton, and there are some documents which explain the program as well as the role of the Kiwanis, the school boards, the foundation, and the other partners in this very exciting and important initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the third tabling is a document entitled Analysis of Sessional Paper 1155, which is the text of the comments I would have said during my tabling yesterday, but I was interrupted.

Mr. Speaker, the final document is a document entitled Tabling Commentary, which compares tabling commentaries against number of words, based on those which have been interrupted and uninterrupted by the Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, I'm delighted this afternoon to table a report that was done by Sue Olsen, former MLA for Edmonton-Norwood, and by the Edmonton John Howard Society. It's entitled Youth Justice Report: Views of Youth on the Justice System, May 2000, a report I commend to the reading of all members of this Assembly.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from Margaret Coutts, who is president of the Red Deer River Naturalists. This group is concerned about detrimental effects to their health and the environment from a proposed 12,000-head hog farm to be located close to the Red Deer River.

The second tabling is copies of letters from Anne and Dale Watson of Red Deer. They are asking that the government stop plans for logging in the area west of Nordegg.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter and a petition from the Kananaskis Coalition expressing their approval on the announcement that the "Spray Valley Provincial Park will become official in December 2000."

Thank you.

1:50

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have tablings here. It's a letter from Sturgeon school division No. 24 and their recommendations as to how schools could better deal with the impact of increasing fuel costs.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With permission I would file five copies of a series of postcards addressed to the Premier and to the Minister of Learning asking them to cap tuition increases at 2 percent. They're part of a campaign by representatives of the 107,000 postsecondary students in this province.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a report on the supports for independence and benefit levels for women and children commissioned by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

The second tabling is copies of a letter from myself to the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee requesting "that the Public Accounts Committee summon a number of witnesses pursuant to Standing Order 66" to deal with the "\$18 million identified in the Annual Report of the Auditor General 1999-2000 on pages 111-118."

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five documents to table this afternoon in the Legislative Assembly. These are documents that I received through freedom of information from the Department of Municipal Affairs. The first one is a letter from the Alberta Home Builders' Association to the hon. minister requesting a meeting to discuss the pine shake issue.

The second letter is from the office of the Premier, and it is a letter of acknowledgment. It is CCed interestingly enough to the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

The third document is a letter to the Premier of the province, and it states in here, Mr. Speaker, that "the durability of treated pine shakes is no more certain than the durability of untreated materials."

The last document, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from the last official minister of labour in this province's history to a councillor of ward 3 in Strathcona county, Karen Bernard, regarding the whole issue of treated and untreated pine shakes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to table the appropriate number of art calendars. At the official launch today of 2001 artwork calendars held at the Edmonton Art Gallery at the 10th annual artwork calendar project put on by Capital City Savings, with participating school boards of Edmonton public, Edmonton Catholic, Elk Island, and northern Francophones, there were 2,600 submissions of artwork from young students throughout our capital region, and 14 were picked. I'm very proud to say that there is an up-and-coming fantastic bunch of artists in our community.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table a series of letters from a gentleman from Calgary by the name of Robin White, no relation, although I gather by his summary that we do agree on a lot of items. He is totally opposed to the major development of the Spray Lakes area in Kananaskis Country and totally agrees with the Praxis survey and further agrees that the government is doing the right thing to care for the responsible stewardship of the environment.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to section 27(1) of the Ombudsman Act I am pleased to table with the Assembly the 33rd annual report of the office of the Ombudsman for the period January 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000, and the financial statements of the office of the Ombudsman as at March 31, 2000.

head: Introduction of Guests

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege today to rise and to introduce to you and through you to all assembled a team of people that are going to lead throughout Alberta a CPR risk, react, recognize, and resuscitate for high school students through the ACT high school CPR program. This program will teach children in grades 10, 11, and 12 the importance of knowing CPR. Dr. Terry Sosnowski, medical director of Edmonton emergency medical services; Earl Clements, the past president of the Kiwanis Club; and Sandra Clarke, executive director of the ACT high school CPR program: I'd ask that these honourable people please rise and that we give them the customary warm salute.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The Associate Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I have two separate introductions I'd like to make today. First, I'm very pleased to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly Mr. Jamie Rice, who is in Alberta for a co-op work term as an administrative resident with Capital health authority as part of his masters in the business administration co-op program from McMaster University. Jamie selected our Capital health authority for his residency because our Capital health authority just happens to have been identified as a leader in health care in Canada. I'm delighted that he's here and that he's accompanied by Mr. Brian Hlus, the director of government affairs at Capital health. I would ask both of them to please rise and receive a very warm welcome in our Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also very pleased to introduce to you and

through you to everyone in the Assembly Mrs. Vickie Belanger and her daughter Nicole, who are touring the Legislature today and are now in our Assembly to view our proceedings. Vickie, of course, distinguishes herself as being the cousin of my wife, Cristine. I would ask that she and her daughter both please rise and receive a very warm welcome from our Assembly as well.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislative Assembly two classes from Father Leo Green in Edmonton-Manning constituency. There are 19 students in the French immersion class, and they're with their teacher, Mrs. Manuela Ferrante, and their student teacher, Miss Ann-Marit Johnson. She just mentioned that she has a full-time job coming up in full immersion. The other class is 27 students in the English class, and they're accompanied by their teacher, Miss Marilyn Marr. They're up in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd like them to stand and get the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly two members of the Progressive Conservative Youth association: the vice-president of organization, Blake Robert, and the first vice-president, Jamie Tronnes. They are both seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure today that I introduce to you and through you to Members of the Legislative Assembly 49 students from one of my favourite schools, Holy Family Catholic school in Mill Woods. Today they are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Caroline Lepps, Miss Donata Christiansen, Mrs. Gail Kossowan, and one of my friends, Mrs. Beth Devlin. They are also accompanied by parents Mrs. Karen Young and Mr. Roy Marouelli. I would ask that they all please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. They are in the members' gallery.

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's not often I get guests up to the Legislative Assembly, and I'm extremely pleased today to introduce to you and through you four very special guests from the town of Olds. They are Gordon and Joyce Jorgensen and Fred and Marlene Campbell. It was their hard work that was instrumental in getting approximately 4,700 names gathered on the petition that I presented earlier today on satellite dialysis. I would ask that they now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Viola Cassis, president of the Graduate Students' Association at the University of Calgary; Monique Tuffs, Graduate Students' Association at the University of Calgary; and Parminder Basran, a graduate student at that university. These three student leaders are in the city

today talking to legislators and trying to convince them that their campaign to cap tuition increases at 2 percent is an important campaign and one that they hope will be supported by members of this Legislature. They've left with me a series of postcards for the Premier and for the Minister of Learning, which I'll see are delivered, with important messages from students with regards to that tuition cap. They're in the public gallery, and with your permission I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

2:00

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

MR. LOUGHEED: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly a class of grade 6 students from Fultonvale elementary school. They are accompanied by Mrs. Karin Bittner, their teacher, and student teachers Mrs. Judy Prins and Miss Gayann Hutchison. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am just thrilled today to introduce to this Assembly and to you a great group of athletes. They are the St. Albert White Sox, the 55-plus slow-pitch team who just this summer won the Canadian championship in Whitehorse, Yukon. In fact, part of their claim to fame they have told me is that they have beaten teams that the Member for Lethbridge-West has played on and the Member for Whitecourt-Lac Ste. Anne. It's a great day for us in the Assembly. If I could read their names and they could stand up as I introduce them: Al Brown, Norm Carruthers, O'Neil Chevalier, Ron Crosby, Rod Gauf, Lloyd Haddon, Vern Holland, Stan Kolomyjec, Brian Kupsch, Clarence McDonald, Archie Miskiw, Larry Murray, George Odovichuc, Leo Provencal, Jack Rudd, Wayne Samis, Don Stewart, Jim Walsh, Glen Winder. They are also here with Marlene Miskiw, Joyce Odovichuc, and their daughter Kari. They are in that gallery as well. I would ask that we please give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 31 students from H.A. Kostash school in Smoky Lake accompanied by their teacher, Mr. Harris; parents and helpers Ms Fletcher, Ms Jarema, Ms Eldridge, Mr. Sawchuk, and Mr. Ponich. I believe they're seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure this afternoon to introduce 42 citizens from the city of Fort McMurray and the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo representing l'école Dickinsfield school's grades 4, 5, and 6 classes. Their teacher, Mrs. Ball, is accompanied today by parent helpers including Mr. Koskovich, Mr. Lowell, Mrs. Best, Mrs. Doblanko, Mr. Ball, Mrs. Clarke, Mrs. Mustard, Mr. Martin, Mrs. Gaudet, Mrs. Parsons, Mr. Lingelbach, Mr. Meintzer, Dr. Levitz, Mrs. Grewal, and Mrs. Chung. Now, the senior member of this afternoon's delegation is a very proud grandmother, Mrs. Mary Koskovich, with her 4-year-old

granddaughter, Angela. They're all here this afternoon representing l'ecole Dickinsfield, and I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Ministerial Statements

Diabetes Awareness Month

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand here today on behalf of the government of Alberta to recognize November as national Diabetes Awareness Month.

Mr. Speaker, in the 79 years since the discovery of insulin too many of us have come to think of diabetes as an inconvenience or at most a controlled condition, but for the 90,000 Albertans with this condition and the estimated 40,000 who do not yet know that they have the disease, the reality is serious. Diabetes is Canada's leading cause of death by disease. Heart disease is two to four times more common in diabetics. Diabetes is the leading cause of adult blindness and of half or more of all of the amputations worldwide.

Our doctors, nurses, and other health professionals provide exceptional care to Albertans with diabetes. To help them with that care today I added the new drugs Actos and Avandia to Alberta's drug benefit list to combat type 2 diabetes. These two drugs are the first of a new class of medications for diabetes therapy. These drugs help to control high blood sugar levels by reducing insulin resistance and enabling the body to respond to the insulin it produces.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a proud history of success in research in combating this disease. Ever since University of Alberta researcher James Collip worked with Banting and Best to develop human-usable insulin, Alberta has been on the leading edge of diabetes research. The University of Alberta has developed a groundbreaking pancreatic islet transplant therapy that holds the possibility to free some diabetics from insulin injections. Eight clinics around the world now use the Edmonton protocol.

Mr. Speaker, just today the University of Calgary announced a new gene therapy that has successfully put type 1 diabetes into remission in lab animals. These findings lay the groundwork for clinical trials on the use of this gene therapy to cure type 1 diabetes in human beings. This is yet another example of our universities using genetic research to solve medical problems and highlights once again the significance of the successful mapping of the human genome.

Mr. Speaker, the first description of diabetes was in Asia Minor in the first century A.D. Now almost 2,000 years later we stand on the cusp of a cure. We all look to the day when diabetes like smallpox will exist only in history books, and Alberta research will have been a significant part of that achievement.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that diabetes requires public awareness and wider public understanding. Diabetes Awareness Month and the minister's remarks on this condition today help to serve this purpose.

Alberta does have a proud history, and the minister is right to laud our researchers, but conditions like diabetes also require sustained government attention and proper, stable government funding, attention and funding that recognize the high costs associated with this disease.

Mr. Speaker, costs for persons with diabetes can range from \$300 to as much as \$1,000 a month. Currently Alberta health care insurance covers a fraction of the potential monthly costs for Albertans dealing with this condition even with the new coverage for Actos and Avandia.

Mr. Speaker, some 90,000 Albertans have been diagnosed with

diabetes. This means their daily routine is in large measure directed by their condition. From their waking hours to the time they go to bed, persons with diabetes must monitor their blood sugar levels and inject their bodies with insulin or take other medication as required. Persons with diabetes must monitor closely their diet and eat only the kinds and amounts of foods their bodies require. For a senior on a limited income the additional out-of-pocket expenses associated with diabetes, including diet, testing, and medication, are a serious hardship.

It's all well and good, Mr. Speaker, for the minister to recognize Diabetes Awareness Month with words, but it would be even better if the minister would also recognize Diabetes Awareness Month with sustainable directed funding, funding that would help Albertans burdened not only with the weight of diabetic symptoms but also the costs associated with treating those symptoms.

Thank you very much.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Electric Utilities Deregulation

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are very fair-minded people, and they rightfully expect that the government is watching out for their interests. Like passengers on a ship they assume that the captain is on the bridge watching out for icebergs and sandbars and shoals and rocks, and they get angry when they realize that the captain has been sleeping on the bridge. The ship has hit the rock, and the Premier is still asleep. When will this Premier wake up to what Albertans know, and that is that his own deregulation policies have led to these higher prices?

MR. KLEIN: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are fair-minded people. The captain has not fallen asleep on the bridge. No captain of any ship remains awake 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, not even this member when she was captain of the health ship. As a matter of fact, you talk about someone who wasn't awake. You know, this hon. member, who was then the minister of health, was asleep at least three-quarters of the time.

2:10

Mr. Speaker, we have not hit a brick wall on this particular matter. The Minister of Resource Development has explained time and time again the causes for rising electricity prices. He's outlined a 10-point plan to address this issue. This is not hitting the wall. This is taking responsibility. This is guiding the ship to come to some kind of amicable resolution to this particular problem.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a very important issue. The opposition leader is sending a wrong message out there. I've said this before. Eighty-five percent of the electricity consumers connected to the Alberta electrical system, over 1 million residences, have up to five years – listen carefully: five years – before they have to make changes, and those are all regulated.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker – this is also very important – there are 124,000 customers that use less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity that also may remain under the regulated system for another three years. Those are two very important areas. In addition to that, a lot of the large industrial consumers, commercial consumers, and municipal consumers have already signed long-term

contracts with the power purchase holders right now, and they are protected.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the person that's criticizing that there is a disaster out there is wrong.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would this Premier please explain to Albertans how the government intends to intervene against itself at the EUB when it's his government's own deregulation policies that have botched it up, led to skyrocketing electricity prices, and led to the whole mess that Albertans are in today?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the shriekings of the leader of the Liberal opposition simply are not true. No matter how loud she yells, what she is saying is not true. She is not being truthful with her caucus, she is not being truthful with this Legislative Assembly, and she is not being truthful with Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, while the intervention may not be typical, I believe and members of this government caucus believe that protecting consumers is the number one priority of government. That's what it's all about. The Leader of the Opposition may choose to fear monger and confuse the issues and distort the facts, but that is doing a disservice to Albertans.

The fact is – and the hon. Minister of Resource Development pointed out the facts – that we are currently in a regulated market. Albertans, as the minister pointed out, will still have the option of remaining on the regulated system for five years; that is, the average, normal consumer. That means the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board will continue to be a regulatory body, and while that role exists for them, we will get involved in a productive way to protect consumers. We have an obligation to protect consumers and to ensure that any regulated rate increases are justified.

Mr. Speaker, I point out again that any consumer can stay in the regulated environment for five years after January 1 of the year 2001.

Now, relative to intervention, Mr. Speaker, anyone can intervene in the hearing process. It is a normal part of the regulated environment, and I would encourage the Liberal opposition, rather than fear mongering, rather than choosing to confuse Albertans and distorting the facts, I would invite them to join with us in the intervention process. The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board hearings are open to the public and are a fair and impartial review process.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, we've been intervening for the past five years on energy deregulation. I don't know where the Premier has been.

Mr. Speaker, what we've got is market uncertainty, we have higher electricity prices, and we have inadequate supply to meet rising demand. Is the Premier now saying that he's going to re-regulate an electricity energy market that he spent the last five years deregulating?

MR. KLEIN: No, Mr. Speaker, we are not going to re-regulate. Indeed, the power companies and many of the people who have signed those long-term contracts do not want us to re-regulate. They want to make sure that there's going to be an orderly transition, and that's what the minister's 10-point plan speaks to.

Where we find anomalies in the system and situations in the system where we think extraordinarily high increases are being applied for, we do have an obligation to protect consumers, and we will do that. I would point out that section 28 of the Alberta Energy and Utility Board Rules of Practice allows for governments to intervene in the hearing process. We will do precisely what we're

allowed to do, and we would again invite the Liberals to join us in the spirit of protecting Alberta consumers.

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

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has spent the last five years ignoring Alberta consumers, and the Premier knows it. The Premier ignored the chairman of ATCO. He ignored the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties. He ignored a former minister of utilities, ignored the Alberta federation of rural electrification associations, ignored the Consumers' Coalition of Alberta, ignored the Public Institutional Consumers of Alberta, ignored the Industrial Power Consumers & Cogenerators Association of Alberta when they tried to tell him that his energy deregulations scheme was going to drive prices up. So the question is: why should anyone in Alberta believe that this Premier is interested in protecting anyone other than himself and his government from this massive mess we are in on deregulation?

MR. KLEIN: How would I be protecting myself and members of my government? We are consumers too. You know, we're all consumers of electricity in this room. Why would we do something that is going to deliberately cause pain to ourselves, Mr. Speaker? We know that a deregulated environment overall is going to increase competition and eventually drive the price down.

Relative to the associations to which the leader of the Liberal opposition alludes, there are other people and other organizations that have totally the opposite view.

I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue. We wouldn't want anyone to mislead Albertans in the information. I have *Hansard* here from 1998. I don't want to read all of it, but there are lots of your members from that side, Liberal members . . .

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Hon. minister, to the point, please.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, very carefully, the hon. members from the opposite side indicated in 1998: we support the principle behind deregulation. So we are moving forward with what you supported. We're listening to you.

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition members have some better ideas or better plans in relation to the whole deregulation process that would help Albertans, the consumers out there, please provide those plans to us.

MRS. MacBETH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Official Opposition has been fighting this from the beginning. The promise of this government was that prices were going to go down with deregulation, and they're going straight up.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier is prepared to intervene against himself and his own flawed electricity deregulation scheme, is he prepared to admit finally here today what he refused to admit two days ago, and that is that his own deregulation scheme is leading to higher prices?

2:20

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, it has been pointed out time and time and time again that deregulation has nothing to do with higher prices. We're facing a situation in this province of unprecedented economic growth. We're facing a situation of power companies not being able to bring on an electrical supply quickly enough. The electrical

producers will tell you that through the regulatory process they've been unsuccessful thus far in getting more transmission capacity onstream. That is being addressed in the minister's 10-point plan.

Mr. Speaker, when I say that the leader of the Liberal opposition is distorting the facts and confusing and misleading Albertans, I say that with all sincerity, because there are so many factors that are leading to high electricity rates. The hon. member is trying to imply that these rate hikes are occurring under a deregulated environment. We are not now in a deregulated environment. We are in a regulated environment, yet the applications for rate increases are taking place in a regulated environment. I think it's inherently unfair, and the hon. member does a disservice to herself and to her caucus and to Albertans by trying to imply that this is now taking place in an unregulated environment. That is not true.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, does the Premier agree with his own market surveillance administrator, who says that one of the key reasons for the uncertainty and the lack of supply in the market today is because of the deregulation process by his government?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, admittedly whenever you bring about change which eventually is for the better, it creates uncertainty. If there's anything that's difficult to bring about – I know that the leader of the Liberal opposition knows nothing about change, because she was always afraid to try something new or to do something differently. We know about change, and we know about change for the better.

Yes, change does bring uncertainty. I can recall when the liquor stores were privatized, Mr. Speaker: great uncertainty about the changes that would take place. When we franchised the registries: great fear about the changes that would take place. But it's all turned out for the better. The opposition yelled and they screamed and they said: uncertainty here; this is going to happen; the world's going to come to an end. Well, it didn't.

There are so many factors. Yes, admittedly, uncertainty is one of the factors. It's not the only factor. There are numerous other factors that are leading to higher power rates.

If the hon. member would like to hear once again from the hon. minister, I will have him respond.

THE SPEAKER: We're going on to the third main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Increased Utility Costs

MRS. MacBETH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta families receiving assistance from the province were struggling to make ends meet well before this government botched the province's electricity supply and price structure. HungerCount 2000, an October 2000 survey of food bank usage, shows that 63 of Alberta's 70 food banks participated in this national survey. Interestingly, the province with the highest GDP per capita, the province with the highest surplus also has the distinction of one of the higher usage rates of food banks by children in the country. In fact, fully 42 percent of those assisted in Alberta are children. My questions are to the Premier. Given that 42 percent of Alberta food bank customers are currently children, how much higher does the Premier expect that number to go as more and more families are forced to divert food money to pay for electricity and heating bills?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again a complete, absolute, I would suggest malicious distortion of the facts. What the member opposite fails to point out is that every household in this province will receive

as of January 1 an automatic \$20 reduction in their electricity bill. In addition, every person over the age of 16 – and a 16 year old could be considered in some cases a child. In the case of a two-parent family, that would be \$600. That goes a long way, to the point where an average household, whether the salary level of that household is in the low level, the medium level, or the high level, will receive in the neighbourhood of \$840. That is very significant.

MRS. MacBETH: Mr. Speaker, given that HungerCount 2000 also shows that Alberta social assistance and disability incomes currently don't even cover one month's rent for a one-bed apartment in Calgary, how are Albertans on disability and welfare incomes to cope as their rents increase by \$25, \$50 – who knows? – on January 1 due to skyrocketing electricity prices?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that is an absolute falsehood and distortion of the facts. When the leader of the Liberal Party stands up and mentions the \$20 a month reduction in electricity bills, when she mentions the \$300 per person rebate, then she's telling the truth. Then she's telling the truth. Yes, there will be increases, but those increases will be offset to a great degree . . .

MS BLAKEMAN: Not for renters.

MR. KLEIN: It all depends. You know, I heard this across the alley. I'm sorry. Across the way. "Not for renters." Well, there are some renters who pay electricity bills. There are different billing situations for different rental situations, Mr. Speaker.

The simple fact is that on average consumers will receive a \$20 reduction in their electricity bills plus the \$300 each cash in hand. Until the hon. leader of the Liberal opposition starts to mention that, she is not telling the whole truth, and she has an obligation to tell the whole truth.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

MRS. MacBETH: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll table again the estimated ATCO bill on an average residence that I tabled yesterday including the rebate.

Mr. Speaker, given that families and individuals working at Alberta's minimum wage must currently use, according to HungerCount 2000, 64 percent of their paycheque to pay for one month's rent in Calgary, how are these Albertans supposed to cope as rents increase due to electrical and heating bill increases on January 1, 2001?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, I'm going to have the hon. minister or ministers respond, but I remind the leader of the Liberal opposition that very significant rebates are being put in place to compensate for the rising cost of electricity. Once again, I think it is improper and it is dishonest. No. I'm sorry. I take that back. It is not quite truthful of her to leave that very important component out.

Relative to the situation as it relates to low-income families, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't think it's fair to leave the impression with Albertans today that our SFI rates wouldn't even cover rent. I believe the location identified was Calgary. This is simply not true. We have a situation with shelter rates and with assistance to low-income families where we look at what is happening in the different situations, and we help certainly as best we can.

In terms of the reference that was made to people working at

minimum wage, I want to make sure that the leader understands that we currently have somewhere around 2 percent of Alberta's population that's working at a minimum wage level. Most of those are students. If, in fact, we have people working in that kind of an environment that have families, we have income supplement plans. We have children's health benefit plans. We have employment tax credits. I mean, there is a situation in Alberta where we do look after those that need our assistance.

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

2:30

Contracted Podiatry Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 29 of the year 2000 as part of its PR campaign around the proclamation of Bill 11 the Conservative government announced that 18 contracts with private surgical facilities were being renewed or extended. In making this announcement, the minister of health said that Albertans will now know what agreements have been made, how much they will cost, and what's being provided. Well, the minister was not being entirely up front in making this statement. My question is to the Premier. Why did the government on the very day that Bill 11 was proclaimed fail to disclose that the Calgary regional health authority was signing a contract for podiatry services with the wanna-be Health Resource Group private, for-profit hospital?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the situation as it relates to podiatry, but I can tell you that Bill 11 contains in it law that requires regional health authorities to abide by certain rules and regulations vis-a-vis contracting out and the disclosure of those rules and regulations and conditions of the contract.

Relative to the specific situation as it relates to podiatry, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the best of my information is that 34 contracts were approved under the Health Care Protection Act, and of those 34 contracts only four were with new providers. The rest of them were with existing providers, and there were no new services that were being provided. I'll be happy to look into the issue of podiatry services for the hon. member.

I can say that the global amount of the contracts that have been approved to this point total in the range of \$9 million. That's \$9 million out of a roughly \$5.6 billion budget for this year, so it's a relatively small amount. It's an important tool that regional health authorities will use. I'll do my best to provide the full information that the hon. member requests.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the Premier: if the government can't be trusted to be forthright with Albertans about the contract between the CRHA and HRG, how can Albertans trust the Premier's assurances that there are no secret plans to allow hip replacement surgeries to be performed at HRG?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I stand to be corrected on this particular issue. Podiatry, as I understand it, is a service that involves treatment of the feet. Now, it's my understanding that podiatry services have been contracted for some time now. It seems to me that some podiatry services are contracted to an agency like the Kerby Centre in Calgary. It's privately contracted.

Now, there are rules and regulations put in place to cover that kind of a contract. Those same rules and regulations would cover a

contract with HRG or any other institution, Mr. Speaker. I fail to see here what the problem is, but perhaps the hon. minister can shed some light on it.

MR. MAR: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I've given my undertaking to the hon. member to look into the issue of podiatry as it relates to HRG with the Calgary regional health authority. I see no reason why we can't look into that and have information brought forward if such information exists.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the minister would also inform this House whether podiatry surgeries already being performed at HRG are being performed despite the fact that the minister has not yet approved that particular contract.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, again, I'll be pleased to look into this particular matter. The process pursuant to our Health Care Protection Act is quite an involved one. It involves the College of Physicians and Surgeons approving certain procedures that can be done within private surgical facilities. They have very strict standards with respect to whether they can be safely done from a medical point of view, and then the regional health authorities must come to the minister for approval of contracts for such services.

As I have indicated, Mr. Speaker, I'll be happy to look into this for the member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Development of Former Gainers Site

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have some questions regarding the former Gainers packing plant site, which is located in my constituency and which was sold to Fletcher's, now Premium Brands, some time ago. At the time of sale Fletcher's indicated that within a short time a bacon plant would be up and running with many new jobs. So far nothing has happened and the property has fallen into disrepair and my constituents await the jobs that have yet to be created. My questions are all to the Minister of Infrastructure. Could the minister please inform this Assembly and my constituents why there is no development taking place on the Gainers site?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The sale to Fletcher's was under the understanding and condition that Fletcher's would construct a bacon plant on the site. They have until October 2018 to exercise the option. However, at this particular time they are waiting for better security of availability of hogs in the province of Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is: what will become of the site if Fletcher's doesn't develop the site? Was there any commitment in the agreement of sale that development must occur?

MR. STELMACH: Whether or not Fletcher's proceeds with the plant is up to them. However, we do have the right to repurchase the

property for the same amount of money we sold it to Gainers for. As I said before, we have till October 1 of 2019 as a province to exercise the right to repurchase the property at the same price we sold it for.

MR. YANKOWSKY: Could the minister tell this Assembly whether this government has received payment in full for the property?

MR. STELMACH: Yes, we have, Mr. Speaker.

Electricity Rebates for Condominium Residents

MR. GIBBONS: Mr. Speaker, in just seven weeks time condominium owners and renters are facing condo fee and rent increases from \$25 to \$150 per month because of this government's mismanagement and supply of electricity and natural gas. Over the next month many of the 200,000 condominium owners across the province will attend annual general meetings to approve their higher condo fees to cope with massive increases in heating and power bills. Already renters in apartments are receiving notices of rent increases for January 1, 2001. To the Minister of Resource Development: will the minister mail out the rebate information notice by Friday so the condominium owners know exactly how this government's massive electrical price increase and their rebate, small as it is, will affect them?

MR. CARDINAL: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we can do that.

But I wouldn't say that the rebates are necessarily small. We are trying our best to serve the consumers out there when the need is there, and we've always said that we'll continue monitoring the situation and make adjustments accordingly as we move forward.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, we will be selling an additional 1,900 megawatts of electricity by the end of this month. Those dollars will be added to the consumers out there once the sale is completed. Once we determine the formula to use to pass on those dollars, we will be doing that. So to assume that the dollars provided are too small is not fair.

MR. GIBBONS: My next question is to the Premier. Given that the Premier says that the power bills for condos and apartments like his own will drop \$20 on January 1, 2001, could he explain to apartment dwellers exactly why they are receiving notices of rent increases from \$25 to \$50 per month starting January 1, 2001?

2:40

MR. KLEIN: I will tell you exactly and precisely what is happening in my own condominium building. Yes, I did receive notice that condo fees are going up. As a matter of fact, I received a notice two years ago. The percentage of increase is less this time than it was the last time around, and that's before there was any talk of any electricity increases.

My condo fees will go up by, oh, I think it's about \$15 a month, something like that. I'll get the \$20 a month, but that goes to pay for things other than electricity, because I pay my own electricity costs. Every person in our condominium unit pays their own electricity bills. Mr. Speaker, this increase is for the general cost of the upkeep of the condominium, of the property. I pay my own electricity bills. As the reduction applies to my own electricity bill, even with the 14 percent, or whatever it is, increase by EPCOR, I'll still be paying in the neighbourhood of \$5 or \$6 a month on my electricity bill. That is not high.

What I would tell the condominium association, first of all, is that we have the lowest overall taxes in Canada, that personal and business tax cuts in Alberta since 1994 have totaled some \$3 billion.

In 2001 our single-rate tax on income will be fully in place. Albertans will be keeping an additional \$1.3 billion more in their pockets, thanks to the new plan. About 200,000 low-income Albertans will come off the tax rolls absolutely. We've announced business tax reductions of \$955 million a year, and these will be phased in as affordable over four years starting April 1, 2001. Education property taxes will be reduced by \$135 million in 2001 and frozen at \$1.2 billion a year. User fees have been reduced this year, saving Albertans more than \$60 million a year. The M and E tax has been removed. There's been a dramatic reduction in the aviation fuel tax. I could go on and on and on.

MR. GIBBONS: Finally, to the Minister of Government Services. As the protector of consumers in this province what monitoring and enforcement mechanism has the minister in place to ensure that electricity rebates will flow through to the renters?

MRS. NELSON: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier and the Provincial Treasurer and the Minister of Resource Development have indicated in this House time and time again that Albertans will receive, starting the first of the year, \$20 a month for their electrical bills. Those people that pay their electrical bill will in fact receive a refund of \$20. I don't know how clearer it can be if you can't get that. [interjection] If you'd quit yapping, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, I could answer the question.

The members opposite, Mr. Speaker, have had the fun today of trying to mix up rental increases with the power bills. There is a process in place under our landlords/tenants act that actually governs the due notice that must be given for rental increases in this province. I would ask the hon. member if he's not familiar with the statutes to please pick them up and read them, because they were debated fully in this House. I believe the members opposite actually supported the tightening up of rental increases that were put into the new statute.

I do know that my colleague the Minister of Resource Development needs to supplement this answer.

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

Renal Dialysis Services

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dialysis patients in my constituency have to drive up to three hours two to three times a week to receive dialysis treatment. These trips, in addition to the treatment itself, are very physically demanding and have caused some people to actually move from their homes in rural Alberta to the city to access this service. My question today is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What steps has the minister taken to provide a better level of dialysis service to rural Albertans?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to acknowledge the people who organized the petition that was tabled earlier today by the hon. member asking the question. I'd also like to be able to give by way of background a bit of information on how these services are provided not just to people in rural Alberta but to all Albertans.

Renal dialysis programs, Mr. Speaker, along with other specialized procedures such as organ transplants, would be a good example, are considered to be provincewide services. The Alberta Department of Health and Wellness funds the Capital health authority and the Calgary regional health authority to provide provincewide services. Through this funding both the CHA and the CRHA operate separate renal programs in both the north and south areas of the

province. The northern and southern Alberta renal programs each manage dialysis outreach services throughout the province.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial funding allocated to renal dialysis services for 2000-2001 is in the range of \$50 million. That reaches approximately 1,600 people and represents an increase in budget of 27 percent over the previous fiscal year. In addition, special onetime funding of \$6 million was announced on the 18th of May of this year to increase capacity for kidney dialysis to meet the increased needs and improve the quality of care that's provided.

MR. MARZ: To the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Why are the doctors in Calgary not referring patients to Red Deer, which is closer and more accessible, especially in winter months, and would be more of a convenience for those constituents?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the Red Deer satellite program is operated by the northern Alberta renal program and is already operating its sixth unit at full capacity. Residents in the Olds-Didsbury area, those constituents, would normally receive services through the southern Alberta program, which would be operated out of Calgary or Hanna.

MR. MARZ: Mr. Speaker, again to the same minister: when can my constituents who require dialysis expect to be provided with a more accessible service?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, knowing that this question was coming up, the Minister of Infrastructure reminded me that there are expansion plans that have been completed to double the number of dialysis stations at the Hanna site from two to four stations, with three shifts a day for a total capacity of 12 patients. Also, in the south there are expansion plans to increase renal service capacity in Lethbridge by 20 beds. Renal dialysis services are increasing at the rate of 14 percent a year, yet the need for the service continues to rise.

I should note, Mr. Speaker, that a Renal Task Force has been established to look at issues regarding ongoing planning of renal services in Alberta, and on the issue of accessibility I have asked this task force to consider that issue. The southern and northern programs also maintain contact with satellite units and regional health authorities to actively monitor the current and future needs of this program.

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

Video Lottery Terminals

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission oversees a gambling industry in which \$13 billion will be wagered this year with a billion dollars of that flowing into the government pockets. This appointed commission answers to no one but the minister responsible for gaming and his cabinet colleagues. My questions are to the minister responsible for gaming. Given that for two years this government gave selected race track operators a cut of slot machine money that according to the Auditor General was illegal, why, then, did the minister and the gaming commission negotiate an illegal contract?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, that's probably the first preamble I've heard in the last 10 days that actually has a remote proximity of fact when he says: yes, the industry does wager \$13 billion, of which 93 percent is paid back in prizes and stakes, leaving

a mere 7 percent for the use of taxpayers and all Albertans in the Alberta lottery fund.

Now, with respect specifically to the Racing Corporation's normal review procedure, we looked at what we were doing, what were our practices. I think we are a best practices organization. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission asked the Auditor General to come in and say: "Okay. Let's look at this, examine it. Is it appropriate with how the funds flow?" We said: would you please review that? He did review it, and he came back and reported to us that the Appropriation Act is not correct, and the gaming act is out of sync with the way that you're moving the funds through.

Mr. Speaker, then we started to speak with the Auditor General, and on September 11 in the Auditor General's report he said . . . [interjection] "People don't rob banks to make out-of-sync withdrawals," says the member.

2:50

THE SPEAKER: Please, please.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I guess he's accusing the Racing Corporation.

THE SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. member. I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. The second question.

MR. WICKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Gaming: with the apparent collapse of the Resortport in Calgary, who will be given the 450 slot machines ordered for the race track proposal? The Calgary Stampede board?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. SMITH: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it is important to provide clarification that we did not think the Racing Corporation was robbing banks to make out-of-sync withdrawals, as was reported by the Member for Edmonton-Glenora. But what we do know is that the Auditor General said in his report that we need to take measures to correct, and then he said: I am satisfied that the operation and remedial and rectitudinal measures taken by the AGLC are correct in putting the direct flow of funds through the racing renewal initiative in proper perspective, proper accounting, and in accordance with legislation as set out by the Crown.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Resortport application the 500 slot machines were committed to that agreement. That licence has been pulled by the Alberta Racing Corporation, so without that licence, then, there will not be a requirement to put those slot machines in there. In fact, the member well knows that there is a freeze on gaming expansion, that there's a freeze on casino licences, and that nothing is happening until the proper reporting and the new policy come in place for the gaming policy review.

MR. WICKMAN: Mr. Speaker, my last question is again to the minister responsible for gaming. After already waiting for over three years, when can the residents of the Fort McMurray area finally get to see the VLTs removed, as voted upon by the citizens?

MR. SMITH: Well, taking your previous guidance, Mr. Speaker, this is a matter that is before the courts, and it would be inappropriate for me to comment.

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

Palliative Care

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With our aging population there is a growing need for palliative services to care for the terminally ill. During 1998-99 I was vice-chairman of the Alberta long-term care review, with my colleague the hon. Member for Redwater as chairman. We heard from many Albertans about the need for compassionate, palliative care. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. How are we meeting the needs of palliative care patients in Alberta?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the issue of palliative care has been raised by a number of my colleagues in government, including the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, the Member for Redwater, and this Member for Calgary-West. We do take a compassionate and caring approach to palliative care and focus on quality of life for patients and families during a very difficult time.

Palliative care services are considered a core health service in the province, and they are managed and delivered through home care programs and hospice sites in some communities throughout the province. Regional health authorities are responsible for providing palliative care through acute care settings, homes, hospices, and lodges in their regions.

Since the release of the policy framework on palliative care in 1993 Alberta Health and Wellness and health authorities have enhanced palliative care in this province. As an example, Mr. Speaker, both the Capital health authority and Calgary regional health authority operate hospices throughout their cities, quite a number of beds. I should point out that palliative care is a priority in the 2000-2001 business plan for a number of different regions in Alberta.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in March of 2000 Alberta Health and Wellness provided funding to develop a caregiver's guide. This guide describes supports that informal caregivers can provide to dying relatives or friends, and this guide will be distributed provincewide by the long-term care resource centre.

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The long-term care review committee was asked to examine the issue of supporting drug costs for home-based palliative care. Can the Minister of Health and Wellness please advise the Legislative Assembly what has resulted from those recommendations?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I must say at the outset that that committee did an excellent job of addressing this particular issue. As a result of their recommendations on 1 February 1999, Alberta Health and Wellness launched the palliative care drug program, which has been very well received throughout the province. The program provides coverage to any Albertan who is eligible to receive benefits through the Alberta health care insurance plan and has been diagnosed by a physician as being palliative.

What the plan does, Mr. Speaker, is it provides premium-free coverage for medications that are required by palliative care patients. Most importantly, the program increases the quality of life for the palliative patient and supports the patient's choice to be treated in their own home, hospice, or in a lodge.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. Can the minister further describe what type of response this program has received from Albertans?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I think it's fair to say that the response has been very positive, and there have been many supportive letters and comments that have been made. It is a program, I think, that has not only been demonstrated to be widely accepted, but it's widely used throughout the province as well. As at the end of March 31, 2000, we had 338 Albertans on the palliative care drug plan. As at September 30 of this year that number has increased to 655. I think this program has demonstrated that it provides a tremendous benefit to the patients and their families, as I said earlier, during a very stressful time.

Increased Utility Costs

(continued)

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, the Premier's bungling of the electric market is hurting all aspects of society: families, seniors, small and big business, and also nonprofit groups, community leagues, and amateur sport associations. For example, the Knights of Columbus arena here in Edmonton in an estimate from EPCOR will see an additional \$75,000 added onto their \$135,000 annual bill for electricity if they lock in their rates now. That is a 55 percent increase that will need to be covered by families and adult group users of the facility, who are also being hit with increased electricity costs at home. My questions today are for the Minister of Resource Development. Are there any plans to lessen the burden faced by these and similar recreational facilities?

MR. CARDINAL: Of course, Mr. Speaker, we've been working. In fact, I'll be meeting with the AUMA in the very near future. A lot of facilities of that nature, that this member mentioned, fall under the urban municipalities and rural municipalities. A number of them, of course, are already eligible for the rebate program. The \$760 million that we provided back to those particular consumers will go to nonprofit agencies through their municipalities.

If this individual is concerned about prices for facilities in Edmonton, I would do this. If this happened in my own municipality and my own municipality was pushing increases on electricity rates and setting the rates, Mr. Speaker, then I as a member would be approaching the municipality to question the municipality, your mayor and council, as to why those rates are being increased, because they are regulating the processes.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Considering that any assistance these facilities will be getting will not be enough to offset the increase and will still leave a huge increase in the bill, what other measures can be taken so the kids are able to continue to access these facilities when user fees for them will have to go up?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Again, I'd just like to indicate to the member that it's fine to bring questions of that nature to the House, and we definitely made a commitment. We made a commitment that we will provide all the services that we can provide at this time, and we will continue monitoring the process and making adjustments as we move forward.

Again I would remind the member, Mr. Speaker, that maybe he should also be addressing this particular issue along with his leader and the opposition to their city council. They do set the rates. They're the people you vote for to get elected. Go talk to them.

MR. BONNER: Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously doesn't realize that the deregulation program was provincially sponsored, not municipally. Therefore, how does this minister specifically plan and what programs is he going to put in place to ensure that amateur sports facilities are affordable to all children, parents, and adult users of this province?

MR. CARDINAL: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to remind the member that the city of Edmonton regulates the rates, specifically electricity rates, in Edmonton. That member, if he is a responsible member, should be approaching his own council on those particular issues.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we have a very, very strong economy. We have over \$30 billion worth of economic initiatives announced, and they are moving forward. The economy is hot in Alberta, and Albertans are benefiting, including through tax breaks.

head: Reading and Receiving Petitions

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, today seven hon. members will participate in Recognitions. We'll begin with the first in 30 seconds from now.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Ernest Manning High School

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, November 20, I was very proud to attend and participate in the annual awards ceremony at Ernest Manning high school, located in my constituency of Calgary-West. Ernest Manning has a proud history of achievement in many areas: academic careers and technology, fine arts, math, and citizenship. Twenty-seven recent grads were awarded a total of \$36,500 with the government of Alberta Alexander Rutherford scholarships, which honour the high school records of recent graduates presently enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

More than 200 special guests, students, teachers, parents, and friends attended this special annual event, Mr. Speaker. From the Ernest Manning choir vocalists leading *O Canada*, to opening remarks, to the principal's greetings, through an impressive number of individual awards, scholarships, and bursaries donated by the community and individuals, to the finale, the prestigious Governor General medallion, the specially decorated cafeteria was alive with an aura of celebration, caring, pride, and achievement. It was truly a special evening of community for all to remember and cherish.

Thank you.

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

White Ribbon Week

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. White Ribbon Week begins on November 25, three days from today. Thousands of communities and millions of Canadians, indeed millions upon millions across the world will participate in white ribbon campaign activities to show their support for ending violence against women. I would like to recognize organizers and participants of White Ribbon Week. I applaud those who acknowledge their responsibility to urge men to speak out against violence against women. By wearing a white ribbon, they symbolize their opposition to men's violence against women. It is also a personal pledge never to commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women. In Canada we wear ribbons until December 6, Canada's National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Frank Spinelli

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of myself, the government of Alberta, and I'm sure all members of this Assembly I wish to offer my deepest condolences to the members of the family of Frank Spinelli, who passed away earlier today in Edmonton.

Mr. Spinelli, who many know as the owner of the Italian Centre Shop, was not only an icon in the city of Edmonton and indeed the province of Alberta. He was a deeply committed family man and an outstanding philanthropist and community supporter. Many Italian immigrants owe Mr. Spinelli their beginnings in their adopted country through employment prospects and also through his generous support in helping them to get on their feet.

Frank Spinelli will be dearly missed not only by the Italian community but by anyone who had the privilege of meeting and knowing this extraordinary individual.

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

St. Albert White Sox

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to recognize the St. Albert White Sox. This is the 55-plus men's slow-pitch team who hit it out of the park this past summer and won the Canadian slow-pitch championship in Whitehorse, Yukon. This strong team has also won the Canadian championship in '94, '95, '98, and 2000. In fact, four players have been in all four championships: Rod Gauf, Jim Walsh, Don Stewart, and Vern Holland.

The St. Albert White Sox are great athletes, and they not only know how to play ball, but they know how to have fun. I would like to mention their names: Al Brown, Norm Carruthers, O'Neil Chevalier, Ron Crosby, Rod Gauf, Lloyd Haddon, Vern Holland, Stan Kolomyjec, Brian Hlus, Clarence McDonald, Archie Miskiw, Larry Murray, George Odovichuc, Leo Provencal, Jack Rudd, Wayne Samis, Don Stewart, Jim Walsh, and Glen Winder.

Congratulations. You've made us very proud.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Redwater.

Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize members of the newly formed Advisory Council on Alberta-Ukraine Relations. They are the co-chair, the hon. Gene Zwozdesky; members John Chomiak, Bud Conway, Dr. Ehor Gauk, Oksana Hnatiuk, Eugenia Leskiw, Yuri Moskal, Art Mykyte, Dr. Roman Petryshyn, Dave Sereda, Edith Zawadiuk; alternates Dr. Olenka Bilash, Ivan Kupchenko, Lisa MacDonald, Ed Piasta; academic adviser Dr. Bohdan Klid; advisors Wayne Clifford, Barry Mehr; and secretary Jeff Morrison. I look forward to working with this fine group of volunteers from our provincial Ukrainian communities.

Thank you.

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

Sierra Youth Coalition

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the excellent work done by the Calgary group of the Sierra Youth Coalition. This is a dynamic network of youth that initiates and participates in environmental issues and actions. In October they

organized a two and one-half day intensive conference attended by more than 90 people entitled Bridging the Gaps, Understanding and Acting Towards Sustainability.

The purpose and goal of the conference was to offer an opportunity for youth to explore the many diverse and complex perspectives of sustainability through an open forum environment. Perspectives were provided from a variety of community organizations, industry, government, and First Nations groups. Youth were able to assess how sustainability fits into our society and may act as a tool for positive change, while working towards bridging gaps between groups and generations. Their efforts clearly help in advancing and integrating collective efforts towards social, economic, and environmental sustainability. They will be very effective leaders in our future.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Canadian Telework Day

MR. DUCHARME: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize today as Canadian Telework Day. Telework Day is an Internet-based conference which showcases Canadian telework initiatives and supporters. Telework uses new technology to enable employees to work away from a traditional office setting, usually from their homes. More than 1 million Canadian employees currently telework, and the number is quickly growing.

3:10

The Alberta government recognizes the benefits of teleworking and has developed and posted formal teleworking agreements on the personnel administration office web site. Last year's event to track the strong support from business and government leaders focused on the benefits of teleworking in our workforce environment, transportation, and economic development. The Minister of Human Resources and Employment has provided messages of support over the past two years.

What makes this day unique is that organizers of this event do not want people to come to it; that is, not physically. To save fuel, time, and air quality, the only way to get to this event is by logging onto their web site at www.ivc.ca/td2000.html.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: We will move very shortly to a point of order, but before that, hon. Member for Redwater, might I please draw your attention to *Hansard* of last Thursday and last Monday and ask you to perhaps review them, particularly those sections dealing with naming of names? Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo on a point of order.

Point of Order Provoking Debate

MR. DICKSON: Mr. Speaker, it was the second set of questions, and there was a supplementary response from the Minister of Resource Development. The reference in *Hansard* would be *Beauchesne* 408(2) with respect to answers not provoking debate.

I heard the Minister of Resource Development say – and I don't have the Blues – words to the effect that the Liberals supported deregulation in 1998, and in fact it sounded like he was quoting. I couldn't see, but it looked like he had some kind of a *Hansard* excerpt. What's provocative about that, Mr. Speaker, is that I recall being in the House in 1998 when the government had to resort to closure because the Liberal opposition was unable to get questions

answered. I would hope that the minister has not taken out of context some general comment where one of my colleagues has said that as a general rule we're not opposed to deregulation in any particular sphere but make the case that Albertans will be advantaged not prejudiced by doing so.

With respect to Bill 27 – and if somebody has *Hansard* available, I'll stand to be corrected – I specifically remember closure being invoked. Mr. Speaker, in the years you've been here, I know that you've never seen closure invoked when you have the opposition locked up in full support of a government initiative. It doesn't happen, has never happened. For him to suggest, as he did while the cameras were rolling, that this Liberal caucus supported deregulation in 1998 when in fact we were raising concerns in anticipation perhaps of some of the mess that we've seen unfold, is just as provocative as can be. I'd hope that we'd be able to clarify and ensure that that sort of unfounded provocation isn't repeated in the course of this fall's sittings.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Government House Leader on this point of order.

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, it's always interesting when members of the opposition wish to allow the difference in time to allow them to change their position. The hon. minister was quoting from *Hansard*, in fact March 23, 1998, the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, when the member for Edmonton-Ellerslie said, "We support the principles behind deregulation." I could point to a number of other instances in *Hansard* where members of the Liberal opposition supported the concept. The Member for Edmonton-Calder, for example, on second reading debate on the Electric Utilities Amendment Act, 1998, on March 17, 1998, said, "I must say on behalf of myself and at least a good deal of my caucus that we intend to look upon this bill favourably."

There are numerous references in *Hansard* to when the Liberals, talking about electrical deregulation only two years ago, were favourable to the concept that competition – I could quote again from March 17, 1998, from Edmonton-Calder.

The system worked quite well for a long time, until such time as most recently, when across North America we've come into deregulation and allowance for some private enterprise to enter the market. Personally I don't have any difficulty with that. In fact, I think that it is the way of the world, and certainly we have to get [people] to a place where we may – and I stress "may" – be able to as customers reap some of the benefits that competition can and will serve.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals can try and reverse themselves, try and put time and distance between previous positions and now. My colleague was answering the question in a positive, straightforward message and pointing out that in the past they've supported the position that's been taken by the government. Now they're trying to show themselves as being the saviours of the consumer and trying to scare the consumers in this province by raising things and saying that there's a massive problem that the government has mismanaged, but the bottom line is that there was a favourable viewpoint from the opposition, which many, many instances in *Hansard* support, and they can't reverse themselves just because they don't like what they said in the past.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo did rise on a point of order, and he did give the correct citation, *Beauchesne* 408(2), that answers basically "should not provoke debate."

Here's what the Blues actually say. I quote the hon. Minister of Resource Development:

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important issue because we wouldn't want anyone to mislead Albertans in the information. I have *Hansard* here from 1978. I don't want to read all of it, but there's a lot from your member from that side, the Liberal member.

So the *Hansard* Blues point out 1978, at which point the Speaker says: "Okay. Hon. minister, to the point, please." Then the hon. minister says:

Mr. Speaker, very carefully, the hon. member from the opposite side indicated in 1998 . . .

So now we move 20 years.

. . . we support the principle behind deregulation. So we are moving forward with your support. [interjections] Yeah, we're listening to you.

Mr. Speaker, if the opposition members have some better ideas or a better plan in relation to the whole deregulation process that would help Albertans, the consumers out there, please provide those plans to us.

Well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo rose on a point of order. Basically, I think the point he was making was "should not provoke debate," and the hon. Government House Leader came back and quoted from *Hansard* certain things which certainly added to the debate. My conclusion to the whole question period today was: one whole debate, period. So we've had a point of clarification raised by the hon. Member for Calgary-Buffalo, responded to by the hon. Government House Leader with respect to this matter, and we're now going to move on to Orders of the Day.

head: Orders of the Day

head: Written Questions

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given yesterday, I will now move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been served yesterday, I will now move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

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

head: Second Reading

Bill 210

Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000

[Debate adjourned November 21: Mr. Doerksen speaking]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

MR. DOERKSEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you will recall, yesterday afternoon I was beginning to speak on Bill 210. I'll resist the urge to go back and start my speech all over again, but I do want to assure members of the Assembly that today I will not wax poetic. I will probably leave that to another member who might choose to do that today. Today I will stick to some factual matters and try to debate the principles of Bill 210.

If I recall, I kind of left off with the fact that we were discussing the statistics with respect to alcohol involved in accidents, and I had noted that in 1998, 1 in 5 drivers involved in fatal collisions had consumed alcohol. To make matters worse, as the severity of the collision, from nonfatal to fatal, increased, the involvement of alcohol also increased. In 1998 there were 17,345 casualty collisions in Alberta. In 9.1 percent of those casualty collisions the drivers had either been drinking or were judged to have been impaired. For the same year, in fatal collisions 103, or just over 22 percent, of the drivers had been drinking or were impaired. This is unacceptable since we have known for decades that alcohol affects a driver's judgment, reaction time, perception, and increases the severity of traffic collisions. Therefore, it makes sense to consider further restrictions on drivers that drink, and there is a compelling argument to have 24-hour suspensions for anyone caught driving between .05 and .08 blood alcohol.

3:20

Reflecting back, one of the arguments that was presented when we debated the provisions of graduated licensing had to do with whether the tools used to measure blood alcohol were in fact sophisticated enough to be able to measure blood alcohol content precisely. That was one of the reasons in the debate on that bill why we didn't want to go to a zero tolerance: because we didn't think we had the equipment to be able to measure that. I think we have progressed to a stage where, in fact, we do have devices that are sophisticated enough to measure accurately the blood alcohol content, so to move from .08 to .05 in fact is a realistic attempt to try to improve and continue to reinforce the message in Alberta that driving while impaired is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, an impaired driver can be anyone. There is no single image or personality type that indicates a drunk driver, but there are certain statistical groups that remain prevalent. Young males are still the most likely group of drivers to have consumed alcohol before a crash. In 1998 there were more than four times as many male drivers as female drivers who had consumed alcohol and been involved in a casualty collision. The majority of these drivers were males younger than 45 years old. In terms of involvement per 1,000 licensed drivers, males between 18 and 21 years of age were most likely to have been drinking before the crash.

Impaired driving can happen at any time and anywhere, but the odds go up for collisions involving alcohol on weekends, in the early morning hours, and during warm-weather months. In Alberta in 1998 October was the month with the highest number of casualty collisions involving alcohol, almost 11 percent of the total. May had the highest number of alcohol-involved fatal collisions, with 13 percent. A little-known fact is that most fatal and nonfatal collisions involving alcohol in Alberta during 1998 occurred on Saturdays. The most likely time period for these collisions on any day of the week was between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m.

With these statistics in mind, police officers in co-operation with other organizations step up Check Stop initiatives to stop impaired drivers before an accident occurs. The compelling argument behind Bill 210 is that it is still possible for a driver who blows between .05 and .08 to drive away from these Check Stops. Currently an officer only has the discretion to impose a 24-hour suspension if they suspect that an individual is impaired through their behaviour. This clearly should not be the case when many credible studies by leading researchers indicate that drivers between .05 and .08 are in fact impaired, have judgment loss, and loss of sensory perception.

In addition to the loss of life and limb let us not ignore the incredible toll this takes on our health care system and the ripple

effect on other costs to taxpayers. It is not only an issue of death and injury. It is an issue of responsibility in so many ways.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall a rather tragic accident that happened in my own city of Red Deer and one that was actually the catapult that led to some changes to our regulations to do with riding in the back of pickup trucks. Not widely talked about in that case but probably more significant an issue was the fact of the impairment of the driver of that pickup truck. Not only do I consider it important with respect to riding unrestrained in vehicles, but the issue clearly in this case was a matter of intoxication.

With the rules we have and the legislation we have and the attitude we have toward drinking and driving, clearly we've been making progress in our society, but we must continue to take steps to encourage people to act responsibly. I think what the member has done here with this bill in allowing the 24-hour suspension of a licence for that .05 to .08 makes good common sense. It advances the yardstick, if I can use that analogy, to help us to continue to drive that message home.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments I will now take my place and listen to the other comments from speakers.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure this afternoon to make a few observations about Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I think not only all members of this Assembly but all members of society here in Alberta and, in fact, the world certainly want to see impaired drivers off the road. We all have a responsibility to do just that.

Now, then, the federal government, when they decided to put in a level of .08, certainly had done an incredible amount of testing to come up with that figure. When that figure was established, there were quite a few cries that this figure was far too low, and there were other cries that this figure was high. It was a level that was set where people could still operate a motor vehicle and the maximum level where people could operate a motor vehicle. So when this was established, the intent of that law was to get at those people that violate that level.

This existing law certainly has altered – drastically altered – the behaviour patterns of people who are driving and particularly the youth of today. We certainly see a much, much more responsible attitude towards drinking and driving today from our youth than we've ever seen before. Now, then, as well we have many, many organizations out there who, again, are profiling and bringing the message to people. We have programs in schools such as DARE. We have a program, which will be starting very soon, called Operation Red Nose. We have the PARTY program. We have had for many years safe grads here in the province. So all of these organizations certainly are doing their part to educate to try and prevent drunk drivers on the road.

Now, then, in her opening comments the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek certainly outlined that the severity of the accident in very serious accidents and that the number of deaths certainly were attributed to higher amounts of alcohol. I don't think there is anybody in this Assembly or the province that doesn't agree that more can be done. So what are some of the things we can do if we truly are concerned about getting drunk drivers off the road? What can we do?

3:30

Well, let's look at what we can do as a province. What could we do to lessen the opportunity for people to be behind the wheel when they shouldn't be driving? This province licenses every liquor outlet

in this province that sells alcoholic beverages. We have not decreased the amount of time those are open, but we've increased the time. So have we done our part, our responsibility to shut that down? What have we also done for people that serve alcohol in the restaurants and bars or whatever in this province? Have we decreased the time that those establishments are allowed to stay open? No. We've increased the time, and we've also included Sunday drinking now. We as a province certainly could look at those two situations and say: "Yes, we have a responsibility. Yes, we are serious in cutting down the availability of alcohol when people can be out on the roads." We certainly can do our part there as well.

Now, I noticed that last week AADAC's annual report came out, and in reading this report, I was quite interested in some of the comments that they have here. One I'll quote out of the report.

The best prevention programs are based on efforts to "build better people" by focusing on the strengths young people have and encouraging adults to play an active, supporting role in children's lives.

This to me is how we are going to impact, how we are going to change the behaviours of people in this province and something that we can definitely be committed to.

When I look here in the supplementary estimates, general revenue fund, I see that we have an increase of \$1,826,000 for assistance to the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. Then I say: if we are truly committed to educating our youth, to educating our population, how much of this money went into further development of programs that will impact people and that will get them off the roads when they have been drinking and prevent them from going on and causing the carnage that happens when we have these horrific accidents?

Now, then, we can be proactive, Mr. Speaker. We can make a difference. I think that rather than an arbitrary amount of .05, we can do things that will impact our message much more strongly than that. What we want here is prevention. What we have to do is look at those people who are causing these horrific accidents, the people who are not at .08. The seriousness of the accident, as the speaker from Calgary-Fish Creek has said in her opening remarks, was that the people were far in excess. These are the people who are driving when their licences are suspended as well. So those are the people that we have to focus on. Those are the people that we should be targeting not with the law but with education programs and counseling.

As well, what else could we do in this province? Well, we have the right in this province to license at what age people in this province can buy alcohol. We also have the right to license at what age these people can go into an establishment that serves alcohol. Now, in many of the provinces here in this country that age is 19 years, yet ours remains at 18 years. So there again I think this is another area where, if we are serious, we can be very, very proactive in regards to that.

I think that when we look at these other suggestions, all we can do is get a much healthier attitude towards drinking and driving. We have come a long way, Mr. Speaker, since the original limits were put in, and we certainly can create much more awareness of what is happening in the province today.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

What we have to do here as well is expand the net. In other words, how can we reach these various groups that are out there? How can we reach those individuals who constantly get behind the wheel of their vehicle when their alcohol limit is over .08? That is our challenge today: not setting a limit lower, that I don't think will

have that much influence or would not have the lasting impact, the lasting influence that we seriously need in this society.

You know, we have organizations out there like MADD, SADD, PAID, and these people do a magnificent job. They are certainly bringing the awareness of impaired driving to the front, and certainly there isn't anyone that doesn't know the anguish that a family goes through when they lose a loved one due to an impaired driver. That pain is a searing pain. It's a pain that never goes away, and the intensity of that pain certainly is there for them for the rest of their lives.

What I would like to emphasize most of all, Madam Speaker, is that if indeed we are serious in this province about getting impaired drivers off the road, then there are many things which are proactive. There are many educational programs that we could certainly be supporting more fully. There is certainly legislation that we could bring in which would definitely impact those people who have been charged, who do have a degree of recidivism, when they are drinking again and trying to climb back behind the wheel when they are under suspension or when their blood alcohol level is greater than .08.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, those are a number of the observations that I would like to add to the record when we're dealing with Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000.

Thank you very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure for me to rise this afternoon to speak about Bill 210, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act, in support of the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, who has brought this to the floor, and certainly I agree with the comments of the previous member, Edmonton-Glengarry, as well.

Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. members of the Assembly of some of the reasons why such an important initiative as Bill 210 is necessary in the fight against drunk driving. Alberta has the fifth highest rate of people charged. That's the fifth highest rate of people charged with impaired driving out of all the jurisdictions in Canada and almost two times as many as those in our neighbouring province of British Columbia and also in central Canada, in Ontario. This is quite alarming. In 1998 one out of five drivers involved in fatal collisions had consumed alcohol. As the involvement of alcohol increased, so did the severity of the accidents, and there was a direct correlation between the involvement of alcohol and the severity of the accidents. Back in 1998 there were over 17,000 casualty collisions in Alberta, and in 1,586 cases – that's almost 10 percent of them – the drivers had either been drinking or been judged to have been impaired. In the same year 22.6 percent of fatal collisions involved drivers that had been drinking or impaired.

Madam Speaker, outside the provisions of the Criminal Code, impaired driving convictions can also result in a significant consequence. An accused person routinely faces the possibility of additional sanctions. For example, just one example, most of the provinces and territories, including Alberta, have instituted administrative penalties against suspected and convicted impaired drivers, some of which may be effective immediately and independently of any Criminal Code conviction, and that again is an important initiative. I am very proud that Alberta is intent on that particular administrative penalty.

However, Madam Speaker, it is clear that even more can be done to address this problem and stop unnecessarily placing the lives of Albertans at risk. Every eight hours someone is killed by an impaired driver in Canada. Every eight hours someone is killed in this country because of an impaired driver. It's statistics like this

one that have prompted me to speak in favour of this initiative put forward by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

3:40

This Assembly cannot change the Criminal Code – it is out of our jurisdiction – but what we can do as a province is write our own traffic laws in the interest of public safety. That is what Bill 210 does. It prevents drivers who register between .05 and .08 blood alcohol content from driving for 24 hours. It is a very simple and reasonable request.

Now, Madam Speaker, we should be doing everything we can to make it harder for drunk drivers to offend and to get drivers whose judgment is impaired by alcohol off the road. That is why Bill 210 intends to do that. Other provinces have also legislated brief periods of licence suspension for persons whose blood alcohol content is over 50 milligrams but less than the Criminal Code limit of 80 milligrams. This allows the police to suspend drivers at the roadside for up to 24 hours in the hope of preventing an impaired-driving offence. Really it is preventative, this measure that is being introduced by the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. In Alberta police have their own discretion, but let's strengthen that discretion and allow them to do their job legislatively, and that is the ability legislatively to suspend a person's licence for 24 hours.

Bill 210 would also make sure that there is no question as to whether an individual is competent to drive while in the danger zone of .05 to .08. This would give our law enforcement officers another tool in strengthening driving safety practices across this province. In British Columbia today if a driver is caught driving with a blood alcohol content between .05 and .08, that driver is subject to a 24-hour roadside suspension, which is recorded on his or her driving record.

Saskatchewan, our neighbouring province to the east, uses a point system to assess drivers and their infractions. If drivers are caught a second time with a blood alcohol level within the warning range of .05 and .08, they also will receive an automatic 24-hour roadside licence suspension, and more points are applied to their licence. If an experienced driver is caught a third time with a blood alcohol within this range, they receive an automatic 24-hour roadside licence suspension and must attend addiction screening.

In Manitoba a driver caught with a blood alcohol content level between .05 and .08 receives an automatic 24-hour licence suspension and must pay a \$40 surcharge when they renew their licence. For the folks in the far east, in Newfoundland, drivers caught with a blood alcohol level between .05 and .08 are subject to an automatic 24-hour roadside suspension plus a \$100 licence reinstatement fee to be paid within 30 days.

Madam Speaker, these are tough measures against tough opponents, drunk drivers, who are threats to us all, especially when we learn of young people being robbed of such a young life by being hit by a drunk driver. Bill 210 is not going to take drivers with .05 and .08 alcohol levels and lock them up and throw away the key. It simply takes a driver who is a danger to public safety and removes from them their driving privilege for 24 hours, no more and no less. What Bill 210 is saying is that drinking and driving hurts everyone involved, so just don't do it. Having had a 24-hour suspension is certainly going to make anyone think again before they drive after having a couple, because in fact many impaired driving accidents happen after just a couple.

I would encourage members to give strong consideration to this bill, not only to the legal ramifications but also to the spirit of its intent in protecting all Albertans. This legislation will work to keep drunk drivers off the road, making our roads safer for all Albertans. Having a licence suspension for 24 hours for the drivers in that range

is a small initiative that will pay huge dividends by saving the lives of Albertans. This initiative, I know, is very much supported by Students Against Drunk Driving as well as by Mothers Against Drunk Driving and, I believe, by the majority of Albertans.

Finally, I would urge all members of the Assembly to support Bill 210 in this fight against impaired driving. This initiative from the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek is why she has earned the title the princess.

Thank you so much, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today to speak on Bill 210, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I won't call her the same thing that our hon. member did, but I will thank the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek for bringing this forward and for her dedicated commitment to the families who lost their loved ones. I listened intently as she spoke, and my heart goes out to them.

As I understand the bill before us, it is to allow peace officers to suspend a driver's licence for 24 hours upon tests, breathalyzers, showing the driver to have in excess of 50 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood. Currently a 24-hour suspension can be given if the level is in excess of 80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood.

In studying this bill and looking back to see where other jurisdictions have it, I see that Manitoba moved to this limit in 1997, and other provinces also have similar provisions for licence suspensions for those slightly under the .08 limit. While I support legislation which makes Alberta roads safer, Madam Speaker, there are some questions as to whether or not the .05 limit for a 24-hour suspension will remove the truly dangerous drivers from the road.

We have to focus on and support education. Education is working slowly, but it is working. Society has become more responsible around drinking and driving. Statistics show that impaired driving is very drastic. Previous speakers mentioned the fact of where Alberta is ranked in Canada as well as comparing it with B.C. and Ontario. I think we have to look at how education is working. Our communities are working very hard with the public to inform and to educate, to bring out that drinking is not a responsible item to do if you're going to be driving.

I do know from raising children that you've always got to correct them as they're walking out the door, but I feel that from what I've been told by the last two of my children, there's always a designated driver. This is something that I'm really amazed by. It just happened to be that when I was growing up, liquor didn't give me a thrill such that I had to go out and drink liquor to have fun. I had fun anyway. I grew up in the country. I don't say that a lot of well-educated, well-established people that I know within the city or in the province did not have a good time by drinking.

I do look at a lot of the aspects around drinking, and I go back to the fact of education. You know, it was brought up by a couple of other members, one being the Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, about the DARE program. The DARE program is a wonderful program, and if we could put money into education in this province, we should be putting it into that. As I mentioned the other day in an introduction, there was a Sergeant Ewatski . . .

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

Calgary-Fish Creek to close debate on Bill 210, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to close debate on second reading of Bill 210, Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2000. I appreciate all the comments that I've heard from members in the House. I just want to make one thing clear. What this bill consists of is the fact that if you are pulled over and you currently blow yellow, the police officer has the right to tell you to park your car. What this bill is doing, the only change that this bill is currently making, is saying: you must park your car. That's the only difference. Between what is happening out there now and what this bill contains is one word, and it's "must" park your car. I'd like members to think about that in the rest of the debate, and I thank you for your time.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a second time]

3:50

head: Government Bills and Orders

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

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

Bill 209 Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

MR. CAO: I have no amendment at this stage. Should I continue speaking about the bill now?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, you can go ahead, hon. member.

MR. CAO: Well, thank you, Madam Chairman. I would like to begin by saying that I'm very happy to see that Bill 209 has made it to this stage in the legislative process. It is very gratifying for me to know that so many of my colleagues share my deep concern for the welfare of Alberta children. I also would like to thank the many Albertans, interested parties, and stakeholders for their expression of support and their help in developing and drafting the bill.

Developing this legislation has been a long process for me. In one sense it began when I assisted the former minister of labour. As the chair of the Employment Standards Regulation Review Committee, I discovered that the minimum parenting leave in Alberta is the lowest in any jurisdiction in Canada, and I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Varsity, now the Minister of Gaming, for such an opportunity for me.

In another sense this issue has been with me for even longer than that. In my constituency work I have frequently encountered countless cases of hardworking parents who required parental leave beyond what the current rules allow; for example, one hardworking young family who had experienced the birth of their first child. Unfortunately, both the mother and the baby were not at all in good health, but the father could not take leave to care for them. Instead, he was forced to quit his job. However, having quit his job, he was not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. I also learned of another case in which a new mother had to stay home longer than the current maternity leave period of 18 weeks. She, too, was forced to quit her job and lost all her seniority benefits with the company. I

also know that there are many hardworking new parents who are in distress because of the demands at work and the natural family duties for their infants.

In the course of my work as an MLA, I have also had occasion to visit a number of child care facilities. I realize that the level of care offered in many of these facilities is superb, and I'm also aware that economic realities leave no other alternative for many parents. However, I believe that as a government we should do everything in our power to avoid the type of scene that I've witnessed too many times: very young infants, practically newborn, lying alone in cribs, missing out on the warm touch of a loving parent. This is how I came to see the importance of parental leave from such an entirely new perspective.

It is not easy at first to view the issue of parental leave from the perspective of the newborn or recently adopted child rather than that of the parents or the employers, but once you do consider the issue from the point of view of the child, it becomes easy to see why these changes to parental leave make sense.

I'm extremely happy that so many members of the Assembly were able to adopt a new perspective and give their support to Bill 209. I also know, Madam Chairman, that some of my colleagues have serious reservations about this legislation. Considering the matter from the perspective of the employer, they raised concern that Bill 209 would interfere with business operations and staff utilization. Specifically, it is feared that the provision allowing for 27 weeks of parental leave would increase staff costs and thereby decrease competitiveness. I would like to assure everyone that I have considered this aspect of the legislation very carefully, and there are a number of reasons that the proposed 27 weeks of parental leave would not place a significantly greater strain on the businesses than the current 18 weeks of maternity leave.

First, I would like to point out that regardless of whether the period is 27 weeks or the existing 18 weeks, the cost of recruiting and/or training a replacement worker would be exactly the same. Even if the leave period was as short as one week or as long as 52 weeks, the worker would still have to be found, hired, and trained at the same cost to the employer. These costs are already budgeted in the normal business planning process. Clearly, this aspect of Bill 209 would not cause further disruption.

It has also been argued that businesses would face a drastic loss of productivity if the leave period were extended to 27 weeks. However, statistics confirm that this is clearly not the case. As I mentioned in previous debate on this bill, there are over 1.5 million Albertans in the workforce and only 36,000 births and approximately 200 adoptions per year. Please bear in mind that not all births or adoptions are by out-of-house working parents. Even in the worst imaginable case for the employer, if all eligible parents took the maximum permitted amount of leave, which they don't have to do by law, then there would be a reduction in the labour availability, not productivity, of less than half of a percentage point, according to my calculations.

Surely, Madam Chairman, the vaunted Alberta advantage and the growing size of the Alberta economy could sustain such an unlikely small reduction in labour availability, especially if it is for such a worthy cause. From my experiences in managing staff in the corporate world, I strongly believe that the productivity gained by caring employers and less stressed and loyal staff will surpass such a small reduction.

Not only is this bill likely to impose only a minimum inconvenience to business operations, but it may also result in significant cost savings for government. It is estimated that for every dollar spent on quality parenting programs for children in the earliest stages of development, between \$7 and \$10 in social costs are saved

by the time the child reaches the age of 19. In other words, when we say that Bill 209 is an investment in the future of our children, we mean it quite literally.

Now, Madam Chairman, in order to set the tone of today's debate in Committee of the Whole, I would like to share with you some other comments I received from stakeholders when this legislation was in the earliest stage of development. By referring back to these encouraging statements over the past couple of years, I have been able to remain firmly focused on and committed to the primary goal of this legislation. I hope that my colleagues will keep these sentiments in mind as they debate the finer points of Bill 209 today.

One person from the Developmental Disabilities Resource Centre of Calgary wrote: thank you for the long awaited change in this legislation. Another wrote to say: at last, someone is proposing positive change, and I wholeheartedly support your changes; parents should have the opportunity to be with their new child and promote family ties from birth onwards. Yet another woman wrote: as an approved adoptive parent awaiting placement of a child in my home, I strongly feel that increasing the parental leave to 27 weeks is a much needed, family-friendly change, and the additional weeks provide for such critical bonding time between parents and child; please accept this letter of wholehearted support.

4:00

I received far too many encouraging comments to share them all with you today, but I'll just read one more, if you'll permit. I received a letter from the director of the Calgary Family Day Home Agency, who wrote: as an agency which has worked closely with mothers of newborn children for over 15 years, we certainly support this bill; for the very best beginning of the children of parents who must work, we suggest that parental leave should be even longer.

The director also informed me of research that clearly showed that 80 percent of a child's brain is already developed by age three. The same research has proven that a child's sense of security, which is developed through appropriate physical and emotional bonding with the parents in the first few months, is a prerequisite for proper development and independence. In fact, close parental contact and interaction make a significant difference during the earliest months.

I could go on, Madam Chairman, but I think I have made my point. I urge my colleagues to keep the big picture of child and family development clearly in mind as they debate the specifics of the bill today. I look forward to hearing and perhaps responding to any concerns they may still have. Albertans are looking at us to walk the talk of people, prosperity, and preservation.

Thank you.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to be able to speak to Bill 209. Because it's a private member's bill and the restrictions of time, this is the first opportunity that I've had.

I like the idea of increasing the unpaid maternity leave portion so that people have the option of staying home longer with their new child, whether it be an adopted child or a birth child. I'm glad that adoption is included. I know that not every member knows, but I am going to take just a little moment, if I may, to brag about why I'm so proud of the adoption part of this legislation. It's because just last month I became a mother-in-law. [interjections] Yeah, I know. Don't you feel sorry for my daughter-in-law?

My new daughter-in-law has a little boy who's four. Now, Jordan is my grandchild. I am very, very proud of that, and I would

challenge anyone to question that part, because Jordan is part of our family, and that makes it pretty special for me. Hopefully, God willing, my son will be able to adopt him, because that's in the process too. So that's all important stuff. In fact, I have many nieces and nephews who are adopted, and that's been just such a gift to our extended family that I'm glad to see that adoption is included in this bill.

I also want to point out that I am glad the references have changed to include parental leave. I'm going to give men a few kudos for a minute, so I'm sure they'll all just perk right up and listen there. I must say that men of, I think, actually my generation, which should be a few people in here, are better nurturers than maybe their fathers were just because roles have changed in society.

Certainly I love my father, and I feel so fortunate to have him such a big part of my life. He brought home the paycheque, supported seven children and put them all through university and college and paid the dental bills. My mother ran our household, and God bless her for thriving through that. That was very much the '50s and '60s. However, I would say that in the '80s and '90s and into this new millennium men are doing more of a nurturing role, and that's why I think the leave for men that is addressed in this is very important. I have seen men take a year's sabbatical to stay at home and raise children or work part-time so they can help raise children. I think that's healthy for society, and I think it has to be, if we are going to have strong families, that men must take more of a role in raising children. So I support the change in those words to "parental leave" rather than just "maternity and adoption."

One of the things I was wondering about maybe the sponsor of the bill will have a chance to address for me. One of the things that I was looking at – I like to look at things of course from the mother's point of view and getting the extra time, et cetera, if you can afford it, because it's without pay, which of course eliminates quite a section of people who can't afford to just take time off. Right? Because they are without pay. In Alberta right now it's an employee's world. We're so fortunate here that I know employers who are just looking for people. The stores in the malls, especially at Christmastime, the Dairy Queens, the McDonalds, all kinds of restaurants are desperately short of employees. So I don't know. Have you talked to businesses about what this would mean to them and their reaction to it? I just would be interested to know if you have spoken to them and what has been the response from them.

Some of the sectional analysis that I'd like to take a moment to refer to – I had understood there might be amendments coming, but I hear today that there are not. So there are no amendments coming at all, as I understand it. Maybe the member would like to talk about what he was thinking, but it's decided: no more amendments. So I want to take a moment to speak about section 45, which only offers leave benefits to pregnant employees who have worked for an employer for "12 consecutive months." The requirement that the employee has worked for the employer for 12 consecutive months remains in place, but leave benefits would be open to all employees, and this would include birth and adoptive mothers and fathers. I'm wondering: would there be a restriction on the age of the child that you're adopting? Even if it's a 12-year-old child: is that a factor? That's my question to the sponsor.

The current allowance for unpaid maternity leave is a maximum of 12 weeks prior to the due date and a minimum of six weeks after the birth with an additional three weeks if a doctor gives a note. So right now, as I understand it, there are 21 weeks paid in a maternity leave or in a paternal leave, as it will be now. But this bill – I think it's under section 46 – will allow the birth mother to begin her leave up to 12 weeks before the expected due date, with a provision for a minimum of six weeks after the child's birth. Now, maybe I didn't

read it closely enough, but maybe the sponsor can say: can the two parents split that leave, one of them take 10 weeks and the other one take another 10 weeks? Can it be worked out like that?

4:10

It's been a long time since I've had maternity benefits, you know, so I haven't really dealt with it very much right now. In fact, interestingly enough, I don't think it's mentioned in our members' services. Maybe that's a good thing, but it would be interesting. One never knows. History could be made in the Leg., hopefully just not by me in that way. I'm glad the chair got a chuckle out of that. [interjections] There are a couple of people there catching on to this. That's good.

So I just wanted to ask that of this sponsor, if he would mind clarifying that.

Presently if you're employed – in any industry at all? – you're allowed parental leave. Okay. So this would extend it but without pay and without affecting their jobs. So if I'm a trucker for a big firm, I could extend that leave, but without pay, and my job would not be in jeopardy. Is that correct?

You know what? I'm going to support that. I realize that without pay this may not affect very many people because a lot of people need to work or choose to work, and that I respect. I think I always worked part-time while my children were young. That was a choice we made, and for us it was the right choice. For some people it's not. I respect that every family is different, and how you make it work is the best for you. But not everyone has that choice of taking an extra unpaid leave, so I don't know how many this bill will help. I'm sure it will help some. In reality, when you go on maternity leave, you're not getting full pay; you're getting part pay as it is. Then to go on no pay for an extra – it would be another six weeks; correct? It's another six weeks, I believe, that this bill would provide for. It's nice, and I support it, but I think a lot of people can't afford it.

I don't know if we're ready to extend paid benefits, because I don't know if businesses can afford that. I also don't want to penalize people for having children. My goodness, if we don't have children in this province, we're in a lot of trouble, and I don't think there's anything more important than our children.

So maybe the sponsor could answer a few questions, and since we're in committee I may have a chance again, because I had a few other things, but I'm interested in that before I continue, if you don't mind, Madam Chairman.

Chairman's Ruling Opportunity for Debate

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize another member, I would remind people that we are in committee and this does not restrict people to speaking once. People can speak more than once, so possibly after several speakers the sponsor of the bill might want to stand and answer some of the questions for the benefit of the debaters.

The hon. Minister of Children's Services.

Debate Continued

MS EVANS: Thank you very much. I am very honoured to rise and speak in support of Bill 209 and to in fact endorse the 27 weeks of parental leave for either birth or adoptive parents. Clearly the legislation is of great importance because it affects so many Albertans having children or adopting children.

In 1988 adoptive parents were granted limited adoption leave with strict guidelines. They had to have been with the same employer for one year and adopted a child who was three or younger. They were

only given eight weeks' leave from the date of custody, and only one parent was eligible for leave. In 1991 the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey introduced a bill that would have proposed to change the code so that employees could take advantage of all parental leave under the federal unemployment insurance program. It would also have allowed fathers the opportunity to take parental leave. However, that bill died.

Once again in 1991 the minister of labour at the time petitioned the Justice minister to change the code as it applied to parental leave. The changes would have followed the points outlined by the MLA for Ponoka-Rimbey, but it was never carried out. At that time, as a parent, as a local decision-maker I clearly remember some of the debate centering around whether or not it was appropriate for government to interfere with what parents chose to do and to impose values either on employees or parents for the disposition of parental leave following either adoption or birth.

Parental advocacy groups, however, across North America have vigorously promoted early childhood involvement by both parents for several years. Their belief is a commonly accepted one: that when parents take an active role in their children's early development, they are socially adjusted. Clearly, too, during our discussions at the forum last October with Colleen Klein several people came forward and said several things, among them that early brain development, the early bonding of a child with one or both of its parents preferably, would in fact enhance that child's opportunity for growth and development and for their natural adjustment to the rigours of living.

Inequalities between birth mothers and adoptive parents exist today, but by giving adoptive parents the same access to leave, we recognize the important role that adoptive parents play and that an adopted child is equally important in Alberta. Anecdotally, a very amusing story from my past suggests that in fact adopted children, when told of their adoption, could take pride in the fact that they were chosen by the parents; they didn't just happen to come and have to be accepted.

When you compare other provinces to Alberta, the entitlements for maternity are similar, but clearly Alberta lags behind on parental leave because we have thus far failed to grant leave for fathers.

Ergo I am in support of this bill. I feel the benefits would positively affect both the parents and the children. Madam Chairman, I am confident that with support for the bill by the hon. Member of Calgary-Fort, we will elevate the importance of children in our society and in fact enhance and benefit children who heretofore would not have been recognized.

Thank you.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to stand to speak to Bill 209, Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, 2000. I support Bill 209 because I firmly believe that allowing a parent or both parents to spend just a little bit more time with their children can have a significant impact on the future of the child. In fact, it is one of those more important factors ensuring that the children grow up to be caring, responsible, and well-adjusted adults. As other people spoke of with their children, my children were fortunate enough that my wife did stay home for the first few years, and I do believe that our grandchildren now, with their mother staying home with them, will be well adjusted.

Children do need a longer period of time with parents, and if parental leaves are in line with the government's other intervention programs, that encourages mothers to spend more time with their

newborns. Furthermore, there is currently an intensive volume of scientific evidence that suggests that children who have more direct contact with parents in their early months and years turn out to be better adjusted and healthier adults.

Now, as I'm looking at this, Madam Chairman, the objective of the bill is to increase the minimum number of weeks of unpaid parental leave available, create an option for . . .

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Excuse me, hon. member. I would remind members that at the committee stage you are still supposed to be seated. Hon. Member for Redwater, at the committee stage we do allow some latitude, but standing is not one of them.

MR. BRODA: My apologies.

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

MR. GIBBONS: Thank you. This bill increases the minimum number of weeks of unpaid parental leave available, creates an option for parental leave, and gives birth and adoptive parents access to the same leave options. We are watching that the federal government has brought in a change giving one year's maternity leave, but as we read the news, we're finding out that not all employers in the province will accept more than what was previously in our province. As an employee I can see some of those things. I do believe we should be expanding it by a few weeks. I think it's very, very important. I'll absolutely say I'm not in agreement totally with what the federal government is saying.

4:20

We also realize by listening to the presenter that the government will not be bringing any more amendments forward. I don't know if that's because the minister spoke out prior to him.

Also, listening to the presenter, he says that study after study shows that an early relationship between parents and children is one of the most critical factors in determining the future health and happiness and success of a child. Now, going back to this, currently a birth mother has access to 21 weeks of unpaid maternity leave. Maternity leave can begin up to 12 weeks prior to the expected delivery date and must be at least six weeks after the birth of the child. The six weeks' time frame can be reduced upon agreement between the employee and employer and with a note from the employee's doctor stating that this will not be detrimental to the mother's health. An additional three weeks of leave is available with a doctor's note. There is no legislative option for parental leave. This is an important issue, and if this is in the new legislation, then it's a very good step.

As we are going through some of these bills – and these are spring bills as well as the ones that are coming forward this fall – it's interesting and should be acknowledged that beneath the cloak of a private member's bill is something that is way overdue. In fact, our current maternity leave under the old Employment Standards Code of 1976 is 25 years old. Speaking in favour of the amendment, my rationale is that these amendments standardize the leave benefits available to all new parents, and options for paternity leave are created.

Similar legislation exists in other provinces, as we've heard from other members here: British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. Some of these amendments could have had clearer wording, and minor changes would serve to clarify but not change the intent of these amendments. I do commend the member for bringing this forward.

All references to “maternity leave and adoption benefits” are changed to “parental leave benefits.” The amendment to section 1(1) replaces the first reference to “maternity and adoption benefits” with “parental leave benefits.” The third amendment makes the wording change to the title of division 7 of the act.

I believe it is time that we moved along. Hopefully the presenter has a few different things that he can bring forward from some of the questions from us, but I do believe that we have to move forward with this particular bill. I don’t think that employers will be affected by going one step at a time and bringing it forward.

Madam Chairman, at this time I take my leave.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It’s my pleasure to stand before my colleagues and speak to private member’s Bill 209. I’d like to commend the Member for Calgary-Fort for bringing forward this legislation.

The importance of investing in early childhood development has been demonstrated time and time again. This bill first and foremost is about giving infants the best possible start in life. Bill 209, the Employment Standards (Parental Leave) Amendment Act, responds to the need to provide more flexibility, options, and choices for parents by changing the Employment Standards Code to provide up to 27 weeks of parental leave benefits to be taken by either the birth parents or adoptive parents, by one parent or divided between both parents as they see fit.

There are significant benefits to extended parental leave, not only for children and parents but also for employers and the wider society. These advantages include better maternal and child health and well-being, increased time investment of parents in the early years, increased retention of female employees, decreased recruitment costs, and improved labour market status for women.

If we want the brightest future possible for our province, we must ensure that all our children have the best possible start in life. There’s overwhelming evidence that success in the child’s early years is the key to long-term healthy development. Nothing is more important than for parents to be able to spend the maximum amount of time with newborn children in the critical early months of a child’s life. I say that from the perspective of one who has been a teacher all my life, having worked with children for many years, and also from the perspective of being a parent raising four of our own children and now, this year, as a new grandparent observing young grandchildren adjusting to a new life with a parent on leave from work.

One of the key provisions of Bill 209 is the creation of parental leave. Division 7 of the Employment Standards Code will no longer be entitled simply maternity leave. This may seem like a simple wording change, but I would like to speak in favour of this provision for a moment and explain its significance. The right to parental leave is recognized in a growing number of countries. Over 100 countries, including virtually all industrial nations, have enacted some form of parental leave policy, and, in general, parental leave entitlements are becoming longer.

In France there are 16 weeks of maternity benefits, 84 percent of basic daily wage for the first and second child, and 24 weeks for the third and subsequent children. They also have up to three years of unpaid parental leave, which includes job protection and can be combined with part-time employment or education and training.

In the Netherlands there are 16 weeks of maternity leave and full wage replacement, unpaid parental leave up to six months, and flexible employment conditions.

In the United Kingdom there are 18 weeks of statutory maternity leave at 90 percent of the previous wage for six weeks, 12 weeks at a flat rate, and 40 weeks of unpaid family leave.

When you look at the advantages of extended maternity and parental leaves, it’s not hard to see why these countries are so committed to supporting their new families. Benefits for children and families include reducing household stress and fostering the nurturing of children by mothers and fathers, while simultaneously ensuring continuing economic support for these families. Long leaves of over 20 weeks are associated with better maternal health, as measured by mental health, vitality, and role function, whereas the reverse is true for short to moderate leaves of 12 to 20 weeks. Obviously, then, my colleague from Calgary-Fort was not out of line in establishing the parental leave threshold of 27 weeks.

An increase in maternity and parental leave supports healthy interactions between parents and their young infants and children. Longer parental leaves also allow both parents to share the work and caregiving responsibilities of parenthood. Significant time investments on the part of parents are associated with improved health for young children, and therefore parental leave can improve pediatric health. Such time investments may include breast-feeding, which is related to improved health through a decreased incidence or severity of many diseases and possibly enhanced cognitive development.

In an extensive study of nine European countries it was found that more generous parental leave rights reduced deaths of infants and young children substantially. Parental leaves may thus be a cost-effective method of bettering child health. I found this statistic particularly amazing: rights to a year of job-protected leave were found to be associated with approximately a 25 percent decline in postneonatal deaths, an 11 percent decrease in fatalities occurring between the first and fifth birthday. Those numbers cannot be ignored. Increased parental leaves also provide greater choice for parents regarding how and when to reintegrate into the workforce.

Parental leaves are not only good for children and their parents, but there are also benefits to employers. One is greater employee retention. Numerous studies in Canada and the U.S. and Japan have found that more women return to work after childbirth where parental leave systems are in place. The total length of available maternity leave exerts a strong deterrent effect on quitting the labour force or changing jobs, particularly for a second or subsequent birth. I believe it is clearly more cost-effective to develop a well-planned parental leave policy than to lose the worker concerned and have to replace him or her permanently.

4:30

However, we must ask ourselves whether Bill 209 gives employers enough tools to adequately anticipate their staffing needs. I know that as an employer I would find it extremely disruptive if one of my employees abruptly declared that they needed to take a leave or abruptly returned to work early. I’ve already discussed this issue with my colleague from Calgary-Fort, and I know he is working hard to address it.

Madam Chairman, no one is naive about the costs and concerns of extended parental leaves and benefits. While parental leave can disrupt an organization, especially in the case of small businesses or when it involves highly qualified workers, employers can also suffer heavy costs from the absence of formal arrangements for reconciling work and family life. Some employers, either on their own or through collective bargaining agreements, already offer workers options for longer or partial leaves, and some provide additional benefits to top up what is available from EI. Many of these employers recognize that such practices support productivity and aid recruitment and retention of valued workers, especially as competition for skilled workers increases.

Right now employers are experiencing massive amounts of

change. Many have recognized the need for and advantages of more flexible work arrangements. Extending parental leave provisions and benefits is an important and positive step towards developing a comprehensive approach to children and families and promoting a healthy integration of work and family responsibilities. The last 35 years have witnessed profound changes in the nature of work, in women's and men's roles, and in the ways workplace and public policies affect the well-being of individuals, children, and families. We must attain government legislation, workplace practices, and community supports that work in concert to support a productive economy while also supporting the well-being of families and communities.

Given the importance of the early years for children's development and the benefits of providing extended parental leave, I applaud the private member for his desire to extend parental leave. This province must meet the challenge of modernizing social programs to address the changes we are facing in the 21st century. Adequate and appropriate maternity, parental, and other leaves need to be part of a comprehensive approach to support parents in looking after their family responsibilities. Family issues are not strictly private concerns. They need to be addressed in constructive ways by governments, employers, and also employees.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-North Hill.

MR. MAGNUS: Thank you, Madam Chairman. It's a pleasure today to rise in committee to address an important topic that affects the welfare and the development of Alberta's children. As both a parent and a community member the well-being of Alberta's children is always a matter of deep concern to me. I know my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Fort has their absolute best interests in mind in presenting this bill. It's obvious that if a child is afforded the opportunity to form a strong and loving relationship with one or both parents in the first few months of life, it can't help but have a positive effect on that child's life and on that child's future.

However, Madam Chairman, despite our common goal of raising happy, healthy children in the province of Alberta, the members of this Committee of the Whole may still debate whether the specific provisions of this bill represent the best way to achieve the goal. I would like to applaud the Member for Calgary-Fort for taking the initiative to bring the bill forward and have it debated. Suggestions on how we can improve the lives of Albertans are always welcome, but they need to be carefully examined and debated. Our proper role as legislators is to do our best to improve the quality of life for all Albertans, and in keeping with that goal we have to examine all legislation to ensure that what we pass in this Assembly is of true benefit to Albertans and does not represent excessive legislative intrusion into their lives.

Madam Chairman, you and I both know that this government has gone a long way to improve the quality of life of all Albertans. Our government does its best to use good, well-considered ideas to make Alberta's programs and services more efficient and more useful to Albertans, and these are exactly the things that this government is doing in the area of Children's Services, for example. The Ministry of Children's Services is constantly working with communities and individuals to bring even more effective services to children and families. In fact, the changes that have been implemented over the past several years in this province have made Alberta a leader in the country and indeed all of North America.

These changes have come from good ideas being put forward and debated, with only the best of those ideas being put into action. I

know my hon. colleague from Calgary-Fort, who has proposed this bill, supports the search for these ideas. That's why he has brought this legislation forward, as part of that search and to initiate debate on how extending parental leave can further improve the quality of life for Albertans.

With that being said, I must also state that I do have some serious concerns about specific provisions within the bill and the consequences they may entail. I don't mean to suggest that this legislation wouldn't benefit the children of the province. I don't doubt for one second that some children in this province could benefit significantly from such an initiative. However, my potential concerns are for the overall well-being of women in the workforce and the economic well-being of all Albertans, including children.

My concern with the legislation, Madam Chairman, is for the strong economy of Alberta and how this bill might damage the Alberta advantage, that is so crucial to the prosperity of this province. I must again stress that my concern with this bill does not stem from a lack of commitment to the children and families of Alberta. As an MLA the health and welfare of the families and children of Alberta is of utmost importance to me. I'm simply pointing out some potential problems with this legislation so that my colleagues and I can make a fully informed decision on this important matter.

Specifically, Madam Chairman, I'm concerned with this bill because I suspect the legislation could damage small business in the province of Alberta. It seems clear that we need to assess and consider the full impact that Bill 209 could have on business, particularly small businesses in this province. Small business plays a very important role in maintaining our prosperous economy. Small business is a large employer in this province, and one could say – we've said it for years and years in this Assembly – that small business is the backbone of the Alberta economy. The impact of this legislation could be detrimental to small business, and we must be sensitive to the fact that many operations in this province don't have the resources to deal with the loss of an employee for an extended period of time.

It's a fact that 75 percent of small businesses in Alberta employ fewer than five people. For these businesses the presence of particular workers can be crucial to the success of their day-to-day operations. Like everyone in this Assembly, Madam Chairman, many of my constituents are small businesspeople, and I consider it an important part of my responsibility as an MLA to represent their interests and to help promote the growth of their businesses. Such businesses are vital to the Alberta economy.

In addition to causing staffing issues for many smaller operations, Bill 209 has possibilities of opening up a system for potential employee abuse. Madam Chairman, I'm aware that many companies operating in the province offer generous leave provisions to their workers. For instance, the Alberta Treasury Branch allows employees to take up to six months of maternity leave, with an option for an additional three months without pay. Because generous leave provisions such as this already exist for companies that can afford them, we need to explore the issue in greater depth before proceeding with any change that would affect all companies.

It seems to me, Madam Chairman, that some large companies already allow for extended maternity leaves because they can afford it. It's important to them because of the type of business they're in, and they're trying to attract highly qualified staff to their organization. Many large businesses find it worth while to provide such benefits and have already taken steps to do so. As MLAs we have to consider whether it's the role of the government to require small businesses to provide the same leave. As we all know, every business is different, and their staffing needs are determined by the type of business they're in.

Madam Chairman, Bill 209 also creates another problem. Many companies that find themselves temporarily needing to replace a staff member could find themselves burdened with additional payroll taxes, and the increased costs could seriously undermine job creation in this province.

4:40

This legislation also impacts women in the workplace. While large companies should be able to manage the flow of temporary replacement workers, hiring and training costs at small companies could quickly become unwieldy. As a result, protracted absences from work will continue to cause women to lose their places in the promotion queue. With constant turnover, women risk being denied employment until they are through having children. For similar reasons this bill could lead to an increase in hiring discrimination against women. I don't believe it's in the best interests of this province to add reasons for either overt or covert hiring discrimination.

One example of the possible impact of this legislation is the current situation in the province of Quebec. Madam Chairman, the province of Quebec is thought to have the most progressive and generous maternity/paternal leave provisions in this country. Quebec offers 18 weeks of maternity leave and up to 52 weeks of parental leave. In fact, Quebec was the first province to introduce maternity and parental leave provisions into its employment standards act. This is relevant to our debate because workplace discrimination towards women is a serious problem in that province. In Quebec one woman a day loses her job because she's pregnant or recently had a child, according to the Quebec Council on the Status of Women. The official complaints – 352 in 1999, 359 in 1998, and 374 in 1997 – are probably only the tip of the iceberg. We can well imagine that there are many more cases that are not being reported because many women feel they'll hurt their chances for future employment if they in fact complain.

Madam Chairman, the problem persists even though labour laws and human rights codes have provided tools for addressing discrimination. It is indeed unfortunate that this sort of discrimination exists despite Quebec labour laws, which are thought to be the strictest in the country. On paper a woman taking maternity leave must be guaranteed the same job or an equivalent post with no loss of salary, benefits, or status for at least one year after she returns to work. Furthermore, an employer is forbidden to fire or demote a woman within 20 weeks of her return from maternity leave. However, it is clear from the numbers that even strict legislation like this may not be the answer.

Madam Chairman, what needs to be addressed is the stereotype that once women start having children, they will stop working. While that may have been true in the '50s, the reality today is that nine out of 10 women return to work within one year of giving birth. It seems quite clear, given the statistics, that Quebec's legislation is not working. In fact, by attempting to grant longer leaves to mothers, it may have created another problem altogether.

The final problem with Bill 209, Madam Chairman, is that it fails to address certain types of workers. Due to a changing workplace a growing number of employees are on contract or working freelance. However, many of these Albertans will not benefit from this legislation. Not only are they ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits, but their contracts also tend to disappear during a maternity leave because there are a hundred others waiting to snap up available opportunities.

For these reasons I submit to my colleagues that legislating extended parental leave may not be the answer working parents need. If you'll forgive the digression, Madam Chairman, ultimately

what we need to do is change the mentality of employers. Corporations have to realize they have social responsibilities, and when they hire a young woman, potential maternity leave has to be considered. I'm proud to say that many Alberta corporations have taken the lead on this and have already extended maternity leave over and above what is currently legislated.

Madam Chairman, as Alberta companies extend their responsibility for parental leave, increased competition in the labour force will pressure less progressive companies to get their act together on this issue. That's what I would like to see: market forces working to improve parental leave provisions in Alberta. It's possible that further government interference could prevent these natural market forces from occurring. In this province the reality is that if a company wants to hire young, dynamic, and competent workers, they have to recognize that many of these workers want families too.

Madam Chairman, companies are beginning to realize that it is of mutual benefit for employers to provide extended maternity leave. They're coming to see that it's not just a responsibility for them to create conditions favourable to women having children and to invest in family-friendly policies and practices, but it is actually to their benefit. We see many examples of this occurring already in Alberta. I feel that this legislation sends a wrong message to business and could prevent this evolution from occurring on its own.

I know, Madam Chairman, that all of my colleagues in this Assembly share a heartfelt concern for Alberta families. That I've pointed out some potential flaws in Bill 209 in no way diminishes that concern. I just think that we need to consider the entire picture before we make a major legislative change like this one.

Madam Chairman, in my riding of Calgary-North Hill most of the businesses are small businesses. I have chatted with them over the last couple of weeks when this bill, a private member's bill, came to our attention. Quite frankly, they're concerned about it. My feeling at this point in time is that I do need more time to do more consultation with those people in small business in my communities to make sure that this is the right thing for us to do.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

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

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Speaking to this piece of proposed legislation is a pleasure and long overdue. I'd like to thank the member opposite for bringing it to the attention of this Legislature and this city. It's unfortunate that it's coming so late in the sitting, but it will in this session certainly garner some interest and some debate. Regardless of the potential downsides pointed out by the speaker that went before this member, I do think it needs to be considered and certainly needs to be much more fully debated not just in the Legislature but out in the public too, particularly in those areas that he was most concerned about, the area of small business.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Parental leave has all those same arguments you hear about the potential for women in the workforce to be discriminated against. You hear all of the negatives. You hear those over and over again. What you don't hear enough of are the positives and an understanding of what fundamentally the parents' role is. Now, in days gone by it was the mother's responsibility to raise the children. That is not the case today. We understand the connection between early childhood bonding and the security and the social adjustment of those children. We understand a whole lot more of that, and the legislation has followed, followed way behind, mind you, but it is following.

This is just one more step. Alberta is way behind the times in recognition of the need for parental leave and the need for an overall framework not just to this piece of legislation that if and when passed would allow the extension of the leave but the whole recognition of a parent's responsibility and a government that lends an ear. Now, I'm talking about perhaps extension into areas of taxation and areas of suspension, promotions, all manner of areas that require some honing and an overall framework in order to bring children into the world and bring them into a loving and bonding relationship with one or both parents, preferably beyond just the parents but bonding with the grandparents in the early days too. There is absolutely no substitute for the bonding that occurs in those early days and the security that it passes along to the child.

Speaking in the broader sense of a society's investment, it's this member's view that there is no single more important investment in a society than in its children. We recognize that we the people of the province of Alberta invest a great deal in education from K to 12 and in postsecondary education, whether it be universities or a trade or any one of those areas, and we invest further in adult education. Yet when it comes to this fundamental area of getting a head start – getting that first step, getting the confidence in that little mind so that it is secure enough to venture forward, to break out of that secure position and expand the horizons, to look beyond just the need for a touch and feel secure that there is some support for that learning – that is so fundamental to the needs of a society that wishes to invest in itself.

I would think that this piece of legislation should pass with a breeze, should in fact be studied in society to say: look; here is an area where we really can make some contributions to society in the longer haul. We're talking 10, 20, 30 years when the investment will pay off. Moving from 12 weeks to 18 weeks may be the right number. This member certainly doesn't know, but it certainly needs some examination, and this piece of legislation is a very, very good start.

4:50

There are other areas of this particular bill that interest me: the nonsegregation of a parent, a parent being one or the other of the parents. It doesn't seem to discriminate as to male or female, partner or not, and I suspect that would cover same-sex parents perhaps. I know not. It doesn't seem to outline that. It may be in other legislation that this member is not aware of. Even if it is or it isn't, it matters little. The child is not looking for gender support at this level. This child is simply looking for some care and some attention and just the unequivocal devotion and the love of that parent. That appears to be the spirit of the legislation, and certainly this member would be very supportive of that.

The other area that it doesn't seem to discriminate against – and thank goodness for that – is the adopted child. An adopted child does have a little more difficult time later on. Particularly if there's a visual difference or a magnitude of difference between the birth parents and the adoptive parents and, therefore, with the look of the child, it does run into difficulty. But this child must know that he or she comes into the world loved, loved and cared for, and that is absolutely – absolutely – the most important. So to separate and segregate an adoptive parent from a birth parent would be an error, and I'm very happy and pleased to see that the member included an adoptive parent as equal to a birth parent. I'm not too sure that 12 weeks in advance of an adoption is required, but I do think it certainly requires that period thereafter.

I personally would extend that period well beyond the 18 weeks after a child comes into the world to make that bonding proper. Personally, it worked out exceedingly well. My children are now 17

and 19, both at the university across the river here. Their mother and I chose to go to the expense of having a stay-at-home parent. It was our choice to have my wife stay home, but the option was there to do that. She felt that she wanted to do that, and it worked out rather well for the first 15 years of their life. It seems to have stood them in very good stead in their life, in having a very even keel, recognizing their social responsibilities, and being very adaptive. They developed well.

I would think that giving that same head start to a child could be a little onerous to a society. I happened to be able to make enough money to support a family of four, and that's not the case in all instances. While I think it's certainly desirable, it's not necessary in a society. But if two parents are required to work, it would be nice if society could see its way clear to financing or in some way assisting a parent so a child could get that head start in the first three years of life, until such time as the child is willing to break out and to socialize in a larger community, even though it may be an hour or two at a kindergarten or a day care. That would maybe not be the perfect world, but it certainly would be heading in that direction.

I recognize that the provisions for parental leave in Canada are pretty well accepted now, save and except in Alberta. The proponent of the bill has said more than once that Alberta is lagging behind and it has the lowest level of parental leave. That is certainly not the kind of advantage one would like to think that an Alberta parent does receive from their government.

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

Quite frankly, this piece of legislation is long overdue, and it deserves much more consideration than that which it will receive in this Legislature in that this Legislature may be coming to a close rather shortly and this particular item may die on the Order Paper. I would like to think that this House will support this legislation to the extent that it is clear to the government caucus and the opposition caucus from this kind of legislation, maybe not this particular draft but other drafts, that there should be some energy expended in this area, in speaking of the wellness of children, working on parental wellness at the very early stages as opposed to trying to do it at the other end, when you're dealing with crime and stabbings and the like. Get this base down pat and start working at that level and I would suspect that the outcome would be proven to be most beneficial to society in general and to some parents, to the parents in the next short while, most beneficial to them specifically.

Now, you've heard all the objections. We've heard them from time immemorial. It'll put small businesses in jeopardy of closure. It'll put women at a disadvantage in the workplace by reason of the employer discriminating against a potential mother. You've heard all of that, and yes, it may occur. It does not mean that the legislation should not work towards educating those people. There are societal pressures to say that that is not the way a good corporate citizen would act and react. It is not the way that a reasonable person would react and prove the negative elements and the naysayers of this piece of legislation to be true.

We heard earlier that these kinds of things should be left to market forces. Well, I lay before you that if everything was laid to rest in that wonderful marketplace, then we would not have any WCB, we would not have any minimum wage, we would not have a number of safeguards, of checks and balances, if you will, in a society that does actually care for those that do want early childhood education, particularly for that kernel, that start of a life.

I could go on at some great length, but I would like to again compliment the member opposite for bringing this piece of legislation forward and hope – hope – that he is going to be able to gather

around him some like-minded souls in his caucus to push this legislation to the fore such that it will become a government bill and such that the government bill will then be able to examine the entire area of this parental leave. All of it is associated with bringing a child into a loving relationship with their parents and with the greater society.

With that, Madam Chairman, I will cede the floor to a member opposite. Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.
5:00

MRS. BURGNER: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity this afternoon to speak to this private member's bill. It's not very often you have the opportunity in the Legislature to actually have such a strong influence on the future of society. This is a very strong piece of legislation that allows us to make a very clear statement about things that are important to us, namely our children.

Madam Chairman, I'm quite interested in the fact that this has been a very controversial piece of legislation relative to Alberta's position and where we are federally and the fact that the hon. member has looked at an opportunity not only to bring our legislation into a provincial model that we can showcase across this country but also the opportunity to take an important issue and give us the opportunity to discuss in our Legislature the value of children and the value of parenting.

Madam Chairman, a number of the issues that are raised in the legislation deal with the length of time leave is available. They talk about the opportunity for mothers and fathers, both birth parents and adoptive parents, to have the opportunity to be with their children. They also bring into fact that the workplace, which has an important impact on families, has also a role to play in this. I'm delighted with the fact that this legislation has engaged our employment opportunities and engaged our community to talk about what our values are.

We have some concerns, obviously, about what is the right amount of time. It means different things depending on where you're employed. We have the opportunity in this legislation – and I'm urging and encouraging my colleague for Calgary-Fort to continue his consultation with the community. The last thing we want is for people to feel uncomfortable with the impact to them.

We have some opportunities here, Madam Chairman, through this legislation to identify the crucial needs of bonding with children at the newborn stage and their parents but also to solidify the family unit. We also know that that's a very key factor in the health of our families. We also know that employers are going to be impacted by this legislation. We know we've got some conditions with the federal government coming into play at the beginning of January, so it's not as if the employment sector of our province isn't aware that there are changes that are coming, because this discussion paper has been out federally for quite some time.

So, Madam Chairman, I'm excited about the fact that my colleague has brought forward a very sound piece of legislation. It gives us an opportunity to share with our constituents, the business communities, our families, our social agencies, and our health

community and talk about the impact of this legislation. I daresay over the next several months we'll have the opportunity to continue to discuss this. I think it's important that the member bringing forward this private member's bill have an opportunity to clarify some of the concerns that have been raised in the debate in committee this afternoon, so I'm not going to take too much time. I'm going to ask if he has an opportunity now to answer some of the questions that have been raised.

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

MRS. SOETAERT: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I really appreciate that it's been an afternoon of some interesting speeches, and I have enjoyed hearing the different sides and the Minister of Children's Services. I think the consensus is that we all support families. We all want to make the best possible environment for our children. If that means making a longer parental leave available to people, then I appreciate that. I'm not sure if all the employers have had a chance to peruse this bill. Probably most would support it, because if you have people who are pleased with their work and happy with their job and able to balance family and home and work, then you have happy employees.

I hope we have a further chance to debate this, but I would like to move that we now adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HAVELOCK: Madam Chairman, can I just go straight to adjournment until this evening? Is that appropriate?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. We have to now rise and report progress.

MR. HAVELOCK: All right. I move that we now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[Mrs. Gordon in the chair]

MR. RENNER: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 209.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:07 p.m.]