

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 30, 2001**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 01/04/30

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome back. At the conclusion of the prayer would all hon. members please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem.

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

Hon. members, would you please join in the singing of our national anthem in the language of your choice, and we'll call on Mr. Paul Lorieau.

HON. MEMBERS:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you five esteemed members of the Junior Chamber JCs. I would ask that they please rise as I mention their names. Mr. Georges Bouverat from Switzerland is the world president of the Junior Chamber International. Mr. Bouverat is in Edmonton to consider this fine city, the capital of this province, as a possible location to host what is referred to as area C conference. This conference is scheduled for May 2003 and will include Junior Chamber representatives from 21 different countries including the U.S.A., Canada, and South America, to name but a few. It expects to attract up to 1,500 delegates. Mr. Bouverat is joined by Mr. Tracy DesLaurier, Canadian Junior Chamber national president, who coincidentally resides right here in Edmonton. Also joining them are Mr. Duane Vienneau, Canadian Junior Chamber national vice-president, who also resides here in Edmonton, and Mr. Andrew Woolley, past president of the Edmonton Junior Chamber and bid committee chair for the 2003 conference of the Americas. Mr. Justin Dahlen, president of the Edmonton Junior Chamber, rounds out our guests this afternoon. Missing from the delegation is the man who helped arrange all of this, and that's a good friend of mine and of the Assembly's, Mr. Mike Hodgins, who is senator of the JC movement and a past-president related thereto.

We wish the Edmonton bid committee every success in their efforts to attract this important international conference to our provincial capital in this great province. Would all of you please join me in extending an official warm welcome to these special JC guests.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chairman of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petitions that have been received for private bills under Standing Order (93)(2):

- (1) the petition of the congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer for the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer Amendment Act, 2001;
- (2) the petition of the Royal Trust Corporation of Canada for the Burns Memorial Trust Act;
- (3) the petition of the Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company for the Bank of Nova Scotia Trust Company and National Trust Company Act; and
- (4) the petition of ING Western Union Insurance Company for the Western Union Insurance Company Amendment Act, 2001.

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

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present to the Assembly today on behalf of the Member for Rocky Mountain House constituency a petition signed by in excess of 3,000 people from Rocky Mountain House and surrounding area who are concerned about bed shortages in the continuing care facility to be built by the David Thompson health region. The petition calls for the government of the province of Alberta to make a commitment to ensure that the number of beds, 70-plus, will become a priority issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present a petition today which is urging the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to "ensure that maximum penalties are enforced for all crimes committed with weapons and that all youths involved in weapons related crimes be tried in adult court," signed by 92 people throughout Alberta.

head: **Reading and Receiving Petitions**

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the petition I presented last Thursday signed by 20 Albertans calling for the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the petition I presented on Thursday, April 26, be now read and received.

THE CLERK:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government of Alberta to ensure that Mr. Stockwell Day is made personally liable for any funds required to settle his defamation litigation and that no public funds are used for this purpose.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to file with the Assembly copies of a letter I sent earlier today to Mr. Steve Penikett of Kenn Borek Air Ltd. The letter congratulates the pilot and crew of Kenn Borek for their successful mission to the Antarctica to rescue a physician. The letter expresses the pride that I know all Albertans feel that an Alberta-based company earned such international praise for its heroic work.

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to attach and table five copies of the requisite annual reports for the Municipal Affairs delegated administrative organizations. The organizations are the Alberta Boilers Safety Association, the Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association, the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta, the Alberta Propane Vehicle Administration Organization, and the authorized accredited agencies.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table my response to the questions raised in second reading of Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is the last day of the grace period for employers to comply with Alberta's working-alone regulation. I would like to table five copies of Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees, which we mailed to 110,000 employers across the province, and five copies of the ad that we ran in daily and weekly newspapers to remind employers of the April 30, 2001, deadline to comply with the new regulation.

1:40

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With your permission I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a brochure on the St. Matthew school open house and family wellness symposium, which was held last Thursday.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings today, all on the same theme. The first is a letter from Avenwood Corner pointing out that their electricity rate has quintupled and they are not receiving the 11-cent rate as they are considered a commercial user.

The second is a letter dated March 29 from the Condominium Advocate Association pointing out and asking the government for a review of power rate classification and rebate programs for high-rise condominiums.

The third is also a letter from the Condominium Advocate Association dated April 5 pointing out that after the rebates and the differential rates, high-rise condominium owners are paying substantially more for the same amount of power.

Thank you very much.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is five copies of a letter from Mrs. Judy Bethel, president of Hostelling International, Northern Alberta. She's concerned about the negative effects of skyrocketing electricity prices on the financial stability of their organization.

The second is five copies of two letters from Dr. Tracey Henderson of the Bow Valley Citizens for Clean Air. Dr. Henderson and her group are very concerned about the negative impacts on air quality from Lafarge's Exshaw fuel flexibility project. They believe the original submission by Lafarge contained calculation errors and want the government to conduct a full environmental impact assessment on this project.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the benefit of the entire Assembly the program from The King's University College graduation ceremony, which occurred Saturday, April 28, at the West End Christian Reformed Church here in Edmonton.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a report by a Calgary organization of parents known as SPEAK advocating effective quality public education. The report, titled Report to Calgary School Councils and the Calgary Community with Recommendations to the Calgary Board of Education and the Government of Alberta, recommends immediate reduction in class sizes and greater support of public education.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 109 I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the 12th annual report of the Legislative Assembly Office for the calendar year ended December 31, 2000. This report presents the audited financial statements for the 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 fiscal years and the fourth annual report of the Alberta branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Hon. members who were here in the year 2000 may not be surprised to learn the following. In 2000 the average number of sitting hours per day rose to 6.16 hours, the highest in the history of this Assembly. The Assembly saw an unprecedented 22 requests for recorded votes between midnight and 2:15 a.m. and received a record number of petitions at 431. Nearly 133,000 people visited the Alberta Legislature and Interpretive Centre in 2000. A copy of the report is being distributed to all members.

The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to table the requisite number of copies, being five, of the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee 1999-2000 annual report.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm performing this introduction on behalf of the hon. Member for Highwood. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a young guest who is with us today and I believe is in the members' gallery. Well, maybe in the Speaker's gallery. There she

is. During a time when most people her age were enjoying the first warmer days of spring in High River, Melissa Mathieson spent her free time volunteering on the election team for the Member for Highwood. What makes Melissa's story stand out from that of so many other election volunteers is that she's not even old enough to vote. In fact, she won't be old enough to vote in the next election either. Eleven-year-old Melissa has a passion for politics and is a shining example of the strong values of community volunteerism and citizenship that Alberta's young people demonstrate across this province. The Member for Highwood is indeed fortunate to have this talented young woman in his constituency and on his team. Melissa is accompanied today by her father, Larry Mathieson, and I ask that they rise to receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege today to rise and introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly 48 students from Our Lady of Perpetual Help school. They are here during Education Week celebrating the world of opportunity in the Legislature. They are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Fortin, Mr. Girouard, and Mrs. McCauley. Would they please stand and we could give them a round of applause. I believe they may be in the public gallery.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Mr. Henry Kostyniuk and Miss Jaylene Kostyniuk, his daughter. These folks are here today to experience the Legislature, and they're part of a home schooling program. I'd ask them, if they are in the Assembly right now, to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. YANKOWSKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we celebrate Education Week, whose theme is A World of Opportunity, I'm indeed delighted to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly 44 students from St. Elizabeth Seton school, which is located in the constituency that I'm honoured to represent, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. The students are accompanied by teachers Mrs. Herbert and Mr. Boyechko as well as parents Mr. Marion, Mrs. Stotyn, and Ms Langstrom. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would like them to rise at this time and receive the very warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Mr. Todd Herron. Todd is a very longtime friend of mine, and he and his wife, Avril, and sons Aidan and Mason live in Winnipeg. He is coming to Alberta and visiting with increasing frequency and is often heard humming the tune *Alberta Bound*. I'd ask that he rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Education Funding

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Education Week, and our public education system is facing a number of critical issues. My questions are to the Premier. How can a school board follow your 4, 2 two-year teachers' salary guide when for most school boards 2 percent is taken up for grid increments each year?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the budget provides flexibility for school boards to deal with all of these issues: the issues of class size, teachers' salaries, the myriad issues that face educators today.

Relative to the specifics of the question I will take the matter under advisement and discuss the question asked with the minister.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: how can a school board settle nonteacher salary raises out of this budget when they normally follow teachers' salary increases on a percentage basis and make up about one-third of salaries in each district?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I previously explained, the budget, while it identifies a line item vis-a-vis teachers' salaries, also goes on to provide the flexibility for school boards to deal with all issues relative to the delivery of education, including class size and teachers' salaries.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the school boards deal with this issue when they're being given the money for teachers' salaries based on their '99 teacher employment rather than their 2000 or projected 2001? Why are they getting the money proportioned back two years?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, that refers to a detailed line item in the budget, and I'm not entirely familiar with the intricacies of the situation. I will take the question under advisement and discuss the matter with the minister.

Speaker's Ruling Anticipation

THE SPEAKER: Before recognizing the hon. leader for the second main question, I would like to point out as well that on today's Order Paper the chair notices that on May 3, day 4 of the Committee of Supply discussions, the Department of Learning has been designated and is called as the department before the Assembly.

1:50

Education Funding (continued)

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, how can a school board make the appropriate decisions to reduce class sizes when the 3.5 percent budget increase is going to be mostly needed for salaries? How can the school boards properly deal with their functions?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will have the hon. Finance minister supplement my answer, but I do believe that there is flexibility in the budget, as I stated previously, to deal with all of these issues. I don't know if the percentage figure cited by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is indeed the correct figure or whether that figure was given in its absolute total context. I don't believe it was.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I'd be delighted to supplement. In

the budget this year there are two things. One is a new line item that says salaries – it's clearly there – 6 percent over two years, but in addition to that, the base instructional grant was also increased 6 percent over the two.

It's not the province's role to intrude at the local level of the school district. We leave the bargaining process up to the local school board to deal with the local ATA. There is enough flexibility within the budget to deal with the pressure points, whether it be all on salary or on classroom sizes or the priorities within each school district. So there is flexibility, Mr. Speaker, within that budget to deal with all of the elements and the priorities that are laid out by the local school board, not by this Legislative Assembly.

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: how much flexibility do the school boards have when they get a 3.5 percent base, 4 percent for their teachers next year, when 2 percent goes to increments? They have to deal with their staff. They also have to deal with the costs of increased utilities, which are not being met by the subsidies that are there. How do all of those get built into those two components: a 3.5 percent base and a 4 percent salary?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, relative to the issue of the subsidies – and I'll address that issue specifically – I think that this government has been more than generous, particularly on the natural gas side, both through the program that ends as of today and the new program that will be in effect, I believe, July 1 of this year. Relative to electricity, we have gone some distance to ameliorate and alleviate the cost with respect to the high cost of electricity.

Relative to the line items in the budget, I do believe that those items and the amount that we have budgeted provide a reasonable degree of flexibility for the school boards to deal with the matters alluded to by the hon. member.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has the Premier looked into the possibility of how much class sizes may have to increase in order for the school boards to get the money to meet these other financial obligations that are coming when they don't have the option to truly alter those financial needs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we have to budget based on reasonable assumptions, and the assumption in this particular case is that the amount that we have provided for basic education in the primary and the secondary systems is sufficient for the school boards to find flexibility within those dollar figures to provide the services that are deemed to be adequate to educate our kids.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Teachers' Salaries

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government has decided to change the rules with respect to bargaining with teachers in this province: first, a specific line item in the budget for teachers' salaries, then provocative statements by the minister, and now a media campaign that does nothing more than provoke teachers. My questions are to the Premier. Has the government set out to deliberately provoke job action by teachers?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I take offence to that statement, to the preamble in particular, especially the statement relative to this

government going out and provoking confrontation with the teachers. It was the ATA at Mount Royal College sometime in the midmorning of a day last week that held the news conference that prompted the reaction from the minister of education. The first and opening salvo was fired by the Alberta Teachers' Association without a full examination of the ability of the school board to fully assess the impact of the budget and how they are going to find within those budget dollars the flexibility to deal with precisely the concerns that were brought forward by the ATA. It was the ATA and not this government that fired the opening shot.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: were the radio ads that have been playing placed before last Tuesday's budget?

MR. KLEIN: I'm sorry; I don't know the radio ads to which the hon. member alludes, Mr. Speaker. I can tell you that we have made statements that we want our teachers to be fairly and reasonably compensated. The hon. minister has alluded to our teachers in many cases, depending on the school district in which they teach, already being the highest paid or amongst the highest paid in Canada. We want our teachers to be well paid, but we also want to provide the various school districts – and I believe there are about 62 or 63 – with the flexibility to deal not only with teachers' salaries but with all of the other issues that are so intricately associated with the delivery of education in this province.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: having lost the confidence of teachers, what action does the Premier plan to rectify the situation?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if we've lost the confidence of teachers. I believe that we do have the confidence of teachers. As a matter of fact, there are probably about 13 teachers in this caucus, and they feel very confident with this government or else they wouldn't be here and they wouldn't have run for our government. There may be a problem with the teachers' union and the leadership of the teachers' union. But amongst the teachers, the profession of teaching, I don't believe there is a problem, because they are committed to the education of our children, as we are committed to the education of our children.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is playing cruel games with Alberta teachers, raising expectations of a well-deserved raise before the budget and then crushing their hopes with a measly 6 percent raise over two years. The double standard, backtracking, and hypocrisy on this issue are truly breathtaking. My questions are to the Premier. Why don't teachers deserve a raise that's comparable to the pay raises that nurses and doctors received prior to the election?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there is not a comparison to be made here because the dynamics are different today, as they were different three or four or five years ago. I'll remind the hon. member that teachers have received on average a 17 percent increase over the past I believe it's four years plus another 6 percent over two or something

in that range, depending on how the school districts deal with the particular issue.

The hon. Minister of Learning, as I have already pointed out, has stated that in many school districts in this province teachers are already the highest paid in the country on average, and basically we have said that we want all of our teachers to be fairly and adequately compensated to ensure that our children are well educated. Mr. Speaker, this is not forsaking the wonderful profession of teaching in any way, shape, or form. This is fulfilling our commitment to excellence in education.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier justify a 6 percent increase in teachers' salaries over the next two years when private schools have been given 40 percent more funding over the same period? Why this double standard, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again the hon. member is comparing apples and oranges and grapes and peaches and watermelons and mangoes and bananas. The situation vis-a-vis private schools is totally different. Private schools receive no capital funds. They receive no funds for equipment. They receive no funds for transportation. We subsidize up to 60 percent – it was 50 percent – of the basic instructional fee, and that's as far as it goes. As much as the hon. member hates and despises and loathes alternative education and the parent's right to seek alternative means of education, on the whole and generally across the board the grade average of children attending those schools is at least comparable to if not higher than it is in the public systems.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think supporters of public education should really start worrying about the future of education in the Premier's hands.

My final question to the Premier: why is the government cynically driving a wedge between school boards and teachers by forcing the boards to choose between teachers' salaries and other important priorities like class sizes?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, school boards have always been challenged within budget envelopes to deal with these issues, and year by year by year we have been increasing funding to allow them even more flexibility to deal with these issues. We have said as a government that we want to achieve excellence in education, but like health or like any other issue, you don't achieve excellence by simply throwing money at the situation. You provide reasonable resources.

I'll remind the hon. member that we are spending now on public education, because he alluded to public versus private education, in excess of \$4 billion a year. I know that he doesn't think that that's much – I mean, my God, it would be the philosophy of the socialist NDs to borrow and, you know, drive the province into bankruptcy at any cost, Mr. Speaker – but \$4 billion is a huge amount to spend on public education. This government is willing to put in the resources necessary to provide the school districts and the school boards with the flexibility to achieve quality and excellence in education in this province.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. leader of the third party, would you please familiarize yourself with the preamble rule for tomorrow, please.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Long-term Care

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have recently been informed of a situation that is somewhat due to a growing and aging population that highlights the need for an increased focus on long-term care. The situation is that of a senior couple where the husband requires 24-hour care. His wife, also a senior, can no longer provide the level of care her husband needs. Since there is a shortage of long-term care beds available in their home community of Strathmore, this couple is faced with the possibility they may have to live in different communities after 47 years of marriage. My question is to the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the government doing to ensure that the people of Strathmore have the long-term care services and facilities they need?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to say that I understand it is very difficult in cases where families are separated from their loved ones, and I want to assure Albertans and the people in this Assembly that we are working hard at creating a culture and a system of supports that allow seniors to live as long as possible in their own homes. Last year the regional health authority in the area that was referred to by the hon. member received some \$6 million to build 50 new long-term care beds that will replace existing facilities within Didsbury. It's my expectation that there will be a study that is being prepared for a long-term care addition in the area of Strathmore, and I will be pleased to review that proposal in the context of other capital projects received from around the province.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to this, regional health authorities are preparing and submitting continuing care service plans to me later on this year. Those plans will identify long-term care, home care, and supportive housing needs for each region and their respective strategies within regional health authorities on how to meet those needs. When I receive the plan from regional health authority No. 5, I'll be reviewing it and working with them.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, with respect to this specific case, I am encouraging the officials from health authority No. 5 to work with this particular family in Strathmore to ensure that all the possible options to allow this couple to remain together are explored.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question is to the same minister. What is the government doing to specifically address the needs of all Albertans as the population ages and more long-term care services and facilities are required?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, this government and this department are doing much to support Alberta seniors and their health needs. Regional health authorities have received nearly \$40 million over the last two years for long-term care but also for home care. Last year the regional health authorities received onetime funding of \$172 million to expand capacity and to upgrade existing long-term care facilities across the province; \$42 million of that was specifically earmarked to upgrade or replace rural long-term care facilities and to convert vacant hospital space for long-term care use. An additional \$28 million was approved to help rural health authorities implement the Healthy Aging partnership initiatives. All of these initiatives are designed to help seniors stay in their communities with the assistance that they need, and we remain committed to working with health authorities to address these placement issues.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you.

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

School Closures

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week is Education Week. My questions are to the Premier. How many public school closures can Albertans expect this year?

Thank you.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea. I hope as few as possible, but understanding the challenges of the various local school boards, there likely will be some. How many? I don't know for sure.

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: how many public school closures will there be in Alberta next year?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know. This is a matter for the local school jurisdictions to deal with. But I can tell you that we have dedicated something in the neighbourhood of \$1.1 billion to build new schools and to renovate existing schools. You know, it's typical of the Liberals: the cup isn't half full; it's half empty. So it's not how many new schools and renovations to schools and improvements to schools we are going to make as a government. It's how many schools might be closed – might be closed – under the jurisdiction of the local school boards.

2:10

MR. MacDONALD: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier, my final question: will Alberta be celebrating Education Week every year with school closures?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered that question during the first week of this legislative session. School closures have been going on for years and years and years. The whole question, when I was reporting on these issues – I was reporting back in the '70s and the '60s on school closures. When I was the mayor of Calgary, we had to deal with the issue of school closures. It was an issue during the '80s. It was an issue during the '90s. It's an issue now. It will always be an issue, especially in the major urban centres.

As I explained before, cities are creatures, towns are creatures, and they continue to grow. The demographics of those cities change, and the dynamics of those cities change. School boards are always challenged with the issue of where to open new schools, where to close schools, but they're also being challenged with the issue of how to think outside the box and, if a school is being closed, how they put it to another use. That use could be community use. It could be a use involving seniors. It could be a use involving a combination of community and education. Mr. Speaker, that's what democratically elected school boards are there for: to find ways to deal with these issues, understanding that a city and the demographics of a municipality or a municipal district or a county will never be the same. It's always changing, and they have to be up to meeting those changing needs.

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

Protection for Independent Contractors

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the Alberta government has put in place effective provisions to ensure consumer protection

against unethical businesses, a number of businesses in my constituency expressed to me their concern with the lack of attention to protect them from unethical customers. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. What has your department done to protect independent contractors from dealing with unethical customers?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta we have the Fair Trading Act, which offers regulation and protection for consumers as well as sets a level playing field through standards for businesses. Outside the Fair Trading Act, of course, businesses have access to customer credit checks. As well, they can look at terms of payment as they sit down with their prospective customers.

Within legislation, Mr. Speaker, our department has a prepaid contract business licence regulation where an operator who is licensed and bonded can require an advance payment or a progressive payment in terms of the amount of work that has been done. Within the Department of Municipal Affairs there is also a provision that the hon. member's construction companies may wish to use, and it's called a builder's lien. In short, there are provisions there, and it's a good idea for businesses to get to know their customers and sit down and make the appropriate contracts.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the same minister. Given that our economy is growing very competitive, Alberta businesses, especially the independent contractors that I talked about, cannot afford to waste their valuable time and resources in the government's bureaucratic and time-consuming requirements on them in dealing with the small number of unethical clients. My question is: what kind of help can the ethical contractors expect from the government?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are several ways that both the customer and the business can benefit. Under the Fair Trading Act we have a provision where an arbitration process can be in place if a customer files a claim against a business's bond. Now, there are also businesses that have set up within their contracts arbitration clauses, and one of the best examples of this is the Canadian motor vehicle arbitration plan for new car purchases, where the dealer and the customer can set down and through the arbitration clause come out to an arbitration result. As well, Mr. Speaker, in the province of Alberta we have the Arbitration and Mediation Society, that can offer their services too.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is to the same minister. I learned that in Denver, Colorado, there is a type of arbitration board that sends certified inspectors to the work site to review the work and make binding and final ruling between the contractor and the client. Could the minister tell us if there is a similar function in Alberta, and if there is none, what can we do to set it up?

MR. COUTTS: I can reassure the hon. member that there is arbitration and there are other areas where we can look at providing services to businesses as well as consumers. Contractors and renovators who enter into contracts with consumers and take a deposit, Mr. Speaker, are required to be licensed and bonded under

the Fair Trading Act. That establishes an automatic arbitration mechanism to which we will appoint an independent arbitrator. As well, as I said, the Alberta Arbitration and Mediation Society can provide services, and the Dispute Settlement Centre, which is operated by the Better Business Bureau of Alberta, is also in place for those circumstances.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, would you please, as well, review the preamble rule?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Classification of Video Games

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At a September meeting Canada's justice ministers agreed that each province would come up with its own classification and regulatory scheme for violent video games aimed at young people. At the close of this justice ministers' meeting Alberta's Minister of Justice said, "Protecting our children is a top priority for our government." However, B.C. has now become the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce legislation to ensure that all video games are classified and that youth and children cannot rent or buy video games that are inappropriate for their age. My questions are to the Minister of Justice. Can the minister tell this House if his department's research has shown any correlation between exposure to media and video game violence and aggressive and violent behaviour or even participation in gangs?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, with respect to the preamble, I don't think it's an appropriate or accurate portrayal of a decision made at the justice ministers' conference in Nunavut last September. What happened at that conference was that B.C. brought forward the proposal and outlined what they were planning to do with respect to the classification of video games. Justice ministers from across the country took that information for information and indicated that, quite appropriately, in most cases it was another department of their government that dealt with classification issues, that we had to consult and do those sorts of things. So, in fact, there wasn't an agreement at that ministers' meeting that all the provinces would get into the classification business.

In answer to the question, I don't believe we've done that research.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. Well, can the minister tell the members of this House whether he is planning to follow B.C.'s lead and protect our children and young people from violent video games?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to say that protection of children is a very important concern for this government. We've taken a lot of steps, including the protection of children involved in prostitution, the domestic violence court project in Calgary that we've been involved in, many, many ways of trying to ensure that children are protected from violence in their community.

With respect to the question of classification of video games, I think it's fair to say – and I'd certainly welcome the Minister of Community Development if he wishes to comment – that we're going to monitor what they're doing to see what effect it might have. We're not into building bureaucracies and regulations for the sake

of having them. We want to know how effective they'll be, if they can show that there's a correlation. Sometimes it's useful to watch and see what's happening and see whether it's effective before you dive into it.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister detail to this House any other steps that he has taken since September to explore or to implement this classification and regulatory scheme for violent video games?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, no, Mr. Speaker. I should point out that really the best protection for a child with respect to renting or buying video games is parental supervision. Video games are not cheap; the last time I looked, about \$55 for a video game for one of the new play stations. This is not something that kids just get to go out and do most of the time. What play stations, what games the kids are using are really questions for parental supervision and control. But that doesn't mean that we won't look with interest at what's happening across the country and what's happening in B.C. to see whether they can demonstrate that by putting a classification system in yet another area it will have an effect. If it does have an effect, we'll be very interested in looking to see whether it can be used in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-East, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Working-alone Regulation

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The working-alone regulation was passed some months ago in response to the tragic murder of Tara Anne McDonald, a young woman who was working alone at a fast-food outlet in my constituency. I would like to ask the Minister of Human Resources and Employment what measures his department has taken to ensure the safety and the protection of Albertans who work alone.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, after that tragic death we decided to have a look at our regulation that was involved in this particular area. We had currently running at that particular time a task force involved in looking at all of our general safety regulations. But I also then put together a committee to look at best practices across North America and listened to their advice. So we made a change, as the hon. member has said, on I think it was October 4, and now today, of course, is the last day for compliance with that.

I did earlier today table the Working Alone best practices workbook, that we sent out to 110 employers. We're now indicating to all employers through the media and of course through questions like this that the time is now at hand for compliance with the regulation to protect any Albertan who is working alone.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. AMERY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is being done to make sure that employers are meeting their obligations, and what is the penalty for noncompliance?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we have within Alberta a system of safety inspections. We do have the right under the act to inspect any Alberta workplace with or without notice. So what employers can be expecting from tomorrow on is that if they're involved in a

routine inspection and if it is determined by the safety inspector that there exists a working-alone situation here at this particular workplace, the employer can then expect to be asked to show the safety inspector how they have complied with the act.

Mr. Speaker, employers can do it very, very easily. They can use our workbook. We've provided templates. We're basically asking them to assess the hazard they have in their workplace, to then provide opportunities to either reduce or eliminate that hazard, to make sure the staff know how to reduce or eliminate that hazard but also to make sure that there's proper communication in place so that if the employee finds himself in some difficulty or in an emergency situation, they can communicate immediately a message of distress.

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

Electricity Costs

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A constituent of mine who's given me permission to ask this question owns a business that employs 14 people by importing raw material from Texas and Kentucky, manufacturing it in Edmonton, and selling the finished product back to the United States. She's seen her electricity bills soar to the point where, in her own words, she has lost the Alberta advantage and there's no reason for her business to stay here anymore. She's contacted every electricity company in the phone book but is unable to get competing bids to supply electricity. My question to the Premier: does he believe that meaningful competition now exists in Alberta's electricity industry?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the competition is increasing as we speak. New power is coming onstream, many forms of power that we've never seen before. We see the advent of small hydro micro-projects generating 30, 40 megawatts an hour. We see a lot of cogeneration now coming onstream. Hopefully, once all the environmental concerns have been satisfied relative to our clean-burning coal, we will see thousands of megawatts of new power come onstream. So the deregulation process has indeed provided the environment for competition, and believe me, as that power comes onstream, the prices will come down.

We recognize, as does the hon. member, that there are problems right now. Admittedly, some of those problems came about as the result of uncertainty over deregulation, but that was not – that was not – the sole problem related to the high price of electricity today. There are a number of other factors, including the extremely high price of gas, the booming Alberta economy, the Kyoto protocol as it relates to coal-fired generation, the fact that a number of generators were broken down. As a matter of fact, even as we speak today, there are, I understand, about one or two plants that are shut down, or at least generators that are shut down, causing a heavy load.

I would urge this businessperson, this entrepreneur, this free enterpriser, to hang in there, Mr. Speaker. There are all kinds of things that offset the high cost of power that go to the Alberta advantage: a highly educated workforce, a good quality of supply, lowest taxes in the country, perhaps in North America. There are all sorts of factors that contribute to the Albert advantage, and believe me, as that new power comes onstream, that will then become the Alberta advantage as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to keep my question brief. To the Premier: given that other western provinces have seen

no significant rises in power rates and that Alberta's power rates were stable during the boom of the 1970s, can the Premier tell the Assembly when small businesses in Alberta can expect their electricity prices to return to rates that compete with other provinces?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, we are not the highest in the country, albeit we are on the high side of things. We're slightly above Saskatchewan. We're higher than Manitoba, and we are higher than British Columbia. There are factors that contribute to low power prices in those provinces, and they will probably all always have low power prices, unless of course they do as the socialist Premiers are so strangely apt to do; that is, allow their power companies to export it all. You know, they're talking about it certainly in British Columbia. As a matter of fact, they're doing it and they're talking about it in Manitoba.

The simple fact is, Mr. Speaker, that it's a physical fact. It's a matter of physics. It is. The fact is that both of those provinces have an abundance of water – an abundance of water – and they have the ability to create dams. As a matter of fact, maybe even the Bennett dam – and I wonder if the hon. member likes the Bennett dam, that causes environmental havoc in the province of Alberta, but nonetheless it provides cheap power for the province of British Columbia at great environmental expense to Alberta.

2:30

DR. TAFT: To the Premier. What has been your government's response to the report of the Canadian manufacturers and exporters, which found that electricity deregulation could cost Alberta's manufacturing sector 31,000 jobs?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how it has cost 31,000 jobs. I read the statistics and looked at the statistics just the other day, particularly for one of our primary industries, and that's the oil and gas industry, where they predict that something in the neighbourhood of 19,000 wells will be drilled this year, compared to – what was it? – 15,000 or 16,000 last year. I look at the phenomenal economic growth that's taking place in the tar sands, or as President Bush refers to them, the tar pits; about \$31 billion worth of new construction. I see the phenomenal activity and growth taking place in the information communication technology sector. I see the addition of almost that many new jobs, about 30,000 new jobs, each and every year in this province. I see people moving here in droves. I read about plants closing down in Saskatchewan and in power rich, by the way, Manitoba because of the taxation regime, saying: we've had enough; we're moving to Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, relative to our deregulation success, out of the numerous jurisdictions throughout North America that are deregulating, we are ranked fourth in terms of our total success, and that is after being in the deregulated environment for only four months.

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

Children's Advocate

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since last June the government has been sitting on an important review of the office of the Children's Advocate done by Chan Durrant. Ten days ago the government finally got around to tabling last year's Children's Advocate annual report. Both reports highlight the government's failure to address the serious shortcomings of Alberta's child welfare system. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Why is the government dragging its feet on implementing the important recommendations of the Chan Durrant report, which the minister has had for the past 10 months?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Chan Durrant report is one examination of the Children's Advocate position. Today under the terms of the Children's Advocate position the advocate is available for the children that are part of the system. This new report recommends a much broader horizon for Children's Advocate participation. In other words, we have 750,000-plus children in Alberta. It could, in fact, if you interpret this report, be suggested that we go beyond that child welfare group and advocate for all children. In fact, Schoolworks, a group, has recommended that the Children's Advocate get involved when students are suspended from school.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are numerous things that we have to examine, not only the scope of what that review could mean if in fact the Children's Advocate was always involved when children had concerns, whether they were child welfare clients or whether they were part of the general public. It also raises the question of the role of the school principal in the advocate's situation, of the parent in that situation. We are consulting extensively with the partners that we have through the Alberta children's initiative to make sure that what we bring forward in implementation is the right one and it balances.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, can the minister indicate to the House when the government will provide a response to the recommendations, when the government will indicate whether or not it's going to implement some of the excellent recommendations in this report?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are beginning already. The Children's Advocate has undertaken a review of the public relations or the publicity surrounding the advocate's office, and posters are going to be released very soon that tell children in key places where children gather how to get in touch with an advocate if they wish to. That is one example of several things we are doing to continually implement certain recommendations. The other will be forthcoming as we continue to consult with our partners in Justice, Solicitor General, and Learning principally.

Thank you.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the report calls for excellent recommendations like making the Children's Advocate an independent officer of this Legislature rather than a ministry employee and putting in place a credible independent system to review deaths and serious injuries of children in government care, will the minister indicate when we're going to get some concrete decisions on these matters?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we are very close to being ready to come forward on the matter of the review of fatalities of children. We are very thoroughly looking into the process with the medical examiner and with the Minister of Justice. It should not be long before we'll be forthcoming with some recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, on the reporting to the Legislative Assembly, that may take a little longer, but I promise there will be a response.

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

School Construction

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have heard – and I personally visited one – that there are several new private schools in

Calgary which apparently have been built new at a fraction of the cost being incurred by the public school boards to build their new schools. The private school that I visited appeared in a number of ways to be a superior building – more energy efficient, more flexible, and so on – and apparently was built for only a little more than half the price per square foot of comparable new publicly funded schools. My question, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Minister of Infrastructure: has there been a comparative study done of the costs being experienced by private or charter schools in their new construction and operating costs per square foot as compared to the publicly funded school boards' new construction and operating costs per square foot?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The short answer to the question is yes, but since this is such an important question, I want to expand on it a bit. The fact is that when you look at the construction and the cost of new buildings, there are a whole number of factors that go into it. So I think it's extremely important, as we look at those costs, that we make sure we are comparing apples to apples, because the type of material that you use, the standards that you are building toward, the durability of the building – and as the Premier mentioned and very rightly so today, we have to start looking at what is the end use. Quite frankly, it could be that if we were only using or planned on only using a school, say, for 20 or 30 years, then we should be sure that there is an end use for it. If you're planning on using it for a longer period of time, maybe it's worth putting more money in up front to make sure that it lasts longer.

I think we have to make sure that we are looking, as well, outside the box, as the expression goes, and looking at how we can partner with the private sector. All of those things are being looked at. The operations are being looked at. I can assure the hon. member that it is extremely important to us because there are only so many dollars, and the more dollars we can save on this side of the equation, the more dollars that go into the classroom.

MR. LORD: My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Is the prohibitive cost of new construction of public schools being caused by outdated building standards, requirements, and specifications that could or should be reviewed?

MR. LUND: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, it is true that the codes and the standards that we use do contribute to the cost, so when you are comparing, you have to compare what exactly another school is using. Certainly those standards have been established through a lot of consultation with people in the industry, with stakeholders. That is an ongoing process. They are looked at periodically, and we'll endeavour to make sure that they are the standards that are necessary to provide a safe and clean environment for the children.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. LORD: Thank you. My second supplemental question is to the same minister, through you, Mr. Speaker. Is the prohibitive cost of new schools in the public system and the need therefore to raise additional funds the major contributing factor in inner-city school closure requirements?

2:40

MR. LUND: Mr. Speaker, the utilization issue is a very important factor, but I think it's also very important that we consider in this

whole discussion the opportunity for the delivery of programs. As we have said on other occasions, if in fact your utilization is low or if you don't have some economies of scale within the school, you are going to have more difficulty delivering the various programs that are necessary for a full education. So there is a whole host of contributing factors that lead to the closure of certain schools, where school boards find it necessary to close those schools, but I can assure the hon. member that we are looking at all of these factors, and we will continue to make sure that they play a role in the decision-making.

head: **Recognitions**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, in 30 seconds from now I'll call upon the first of several hon. members to participate.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

Motion Picture Industry Awards

MS HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Saturday night in Calgary I was fortunate to be able to attend along with the Deputy Premier and Loretta Fontana, my assistant, the 13th annual Alberta motion picture industry awards. It is a celebration of Alberta's film industry and a recognition of the incredible talent that we have. From script writing to cinematography to computer graphics to post production, there's very little that we can't do right here in Alberta. The evening recognized Leon Lubin's great contributions to Alberta and his retirement from AMPIA. Also recognized was Horst Schmid as a true friend of the Alberta film industry.

Canada's consul general to the United States was in attendance, a reminder that films transcend borders. It is in fact a global industry, and Alberta films are seen around the world. Dale Phillips' documentary, *Shadows of War*, shows Canada's forensic doctors looking for and finding proof of war crimes in Kosovo. It should be mandatory viewing for all of us. Films allow us to see the horrors that can occur if we don't guard against them. The film people of Alberta remind us of how fortunate we are to live here.

Congratulations to AMPIA and to the Alberta film industry.

Justice Michael O'Byrne

MR. RATHGEBER: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of an Albertan who spent his life dedicated to the service of his country, his province, and his city, Mr. Justice Michael O'Byrne. Justice O'Byrne passed away last Monday, and Alberta is much poorer for the loss.

Justice O'Byrne was born in Seattle, Washington, on September 9, 1925, and grew up in an Irish Catholic family on Edmonton's Victoria Avenue. He attended St. Joseph's high school and was chosen valedictorian of the graduating class. He went on to serve in the navy in the Second World War and retired as a lieutenant. Justice O'Byrne married Eileen 55 years ago last week. Together they raised 11 children, all of whom were university educated. He graduated from the University of Alberta in 1951, the same year that he served as the president of the students' union, and was admitted to the Alberta Bar in 1952. He was a partner in Ogilvie and O'Byrne, renamed Ogilvie and Company after his appointment to the bench in 1967 at age 42.

Not only did Justice O'Byrne dedicate 33 years of his life to serving Albertans on the Court of Queen's Bench, but he also made tremendous contributions to his community. I would like to pass on my condolences to his family and to his colleagues. Mr. Speaker, he will be missed.

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

J. Percy Page High School

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Education Week I would like to recognize the fine work being done by the staff, students, and parents at J. Percy Page high school in Mill Woods. This school has a long history of attending to individual students and their needs in the pursuit of excellence.

A culturally diverse student body has meant that concern for students, their feelings and relationships with other students, is always a central concern. The house system, designed to help students and staff know each other; the Taste of Page, an annual public sharing of foods from ethnic groups; the outstanding Remembrance Day ceremonies; events like the moving commemoration of the UN declaration of human rights signing; along with a rich extracurricular program, which includes sports, music, and the fine arts, are designed to build a caring and stimulating school environment.

The Page global classroom program puts students in real-time touch with peers and experts around the world. The unique partnership with Industry Canada and Shaw Communications is but one example of the school's ongoing pursuit of the best in programming for students. J. Percy Page, the school's namesake, would be proud of the work that is being done and the strong tradition of excellence that has been established in the school that bears his name.

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

Community Volunteer Awards

MR. MASYK: Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker. Last week was volunteer appreciation week, and one of the things that makes our province such a great place to live is the hard work of our community league volunteers. On April 21 I had the pleasure of attending the Edmonton North District Area Council Two Volunteer Appreciation and Awards Night at the Balwin community centre. The volunteers are revitalizing communities in north Edmonton, and I wanted to recognize the president of the area 2 council, Mr. Bill Maxim, and the following award recipients from Edmonton-Norwood: from Balwin Community League, Richard and Viola Kereliuk and Joyce Krachkowski; from Delwood Community League, Wendy Keiver and Dave Palosky. Congratulations to all of these people who have contributed to the efforts of revitalizing communities and strengthening them for our youth and for our seniors.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

St. Matthew Elementary School

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Thursday St. Matthew elementary school held an open house and family wellness symposium in the afternoon and evening. A number of the families whose children attend St. Matthew's experience the same challenges as families whose children attend inner-city schools. This symposium was open to current and potential parents and students. They had the opportunity to explore the school, view student art displays, ask questions about the school, and learn about early childhood services. Display tables were set up in a gymnasium where parents could access free information on a wide variety of topics. Also scheduled throughout the afternoon and evening were guest speakers and presenters.

Mr. Speaker, the dedicated staff of St. Matthew's are to be congratulated for their outstanding efforts in organizing and hosting

this symposium. It is another example of the great work being done outside the classroom by our educators and further indicates increasing demands that we are placing on them and that system.

Thank you.

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

Josephine Nena Timperley

MR. HUTTON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to acknowledge the life and volunteer service of Josephine Nena Timperley, who died April 21 at the age of 90. Nena's tireless volunteer service to multicultural, humanitarian, and artistic causes earned her the gratitude of many. She was the driving force behind the creation of the Edmonton Heritage Festival, the Edmonton Canada Day celebrations, the Edmonton Folk Arts Council, and several other community endeavours. She also opened Edmonton's first blood bank and helped many refugees come to Edmonton. As an active member of the Catholic Women's League who led by example, she mortgaged her house in 1969 to enable 34 young Edmonton performers to travel to Africa for an international folk festival. For her enormous efforts Nena received numerous civic, provincial, and national awards, the medal of Canada, and was appointed to the Order of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, in the words of our Minister of Community Development, who worked with her for 30 years, she was called "Mum" and the Queen of Volunteers. The citizens of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, owe her our profound thanks. May she find the eternal rest she so deservedly has earned.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Leaders of Tomorrow Awards

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to acknowledge the recipients of the leaders of tomorrow awards in my constituency. These awards are given to young volunteers in four age categories between six and 21 years of age who have demonstrated outstanding dedication and excellence in their community service and work.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending the awards presentation in Wetaskiwin, where 27 outstanding young people from Wetaskiwin and the surrounding area were nominated to receive leaders of tomorrow awards. Each nominee was given a certificate, and the recipients of the awards in their age categories were Kyle Widdifield, Jesse Houff, Dean Breikreuz, Laura Ruskowsky, and Dawn Werner. These winners were given an engraved plaque to recognize their efforts and a \$100 cheque that they contributed to a nonprofit organization of their choice.

I would like to congratulate and thank all the nominees and award recipients for the contributions they have made to our communities and for the important work they do as volunteers. Their service and generosity which is recognized now will make them leaders of tomorrow.

THE SPEAKER: The chair would also like to make mention of the fact that today is the anniversary of the arrival into this world of the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

2:50

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mrs. Tarchuk moved that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois E. Hole, CM, Lieutenant Governor of the province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank you, Your Honour, for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate April 26: Mr. Cenaiko]

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

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am truly honoured to be able to speak to this House today responding to the Speech from the Throne. It is especially an honour this afternoon because it is my maiden speech. It is my first opportunity to voice concerns on behalf of the people of the constituency of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake and on behalf of all Albertans. Let me say right now that I hold this elected position to be a very special privilege, and in all my actions in the upcoming months and years I will do my best to listen, to learn, to develop, and to implement ideas that enhance the quality of life in this province.

Let me begin by congratulating all of my fellow MLAs on their successful elections and re-elections. I can tell already from the experience of working with a few of you over the past few months that a strong team has been sent to Edmonton for this 25th Legislature. I look forward to working with all of you and achieving effective results over the next few years.

I'd also like to make some very important thank yous. First, I would like to thank all the people of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for putting their faith in me. I am especially grateful because I know Innisfail-Sylvan Lake faces many unique challenges and needs a particularly strong voice in this Legislature to bring those concerns forward. I want it to be known that I regard your vote of confidence very seriously and will not fail you. I want all residents of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, including those who may not have supported me during the election, to know that I am approachable and open to ideas. As well, I would like to thank Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor for her clear and eloquent presentation nearly two weeks ago and the hon. Premier for setting Alberta forth on such a positive agenda and for steering Alberta towards the agenda with tremendous vision and ability over the past few years.

Before I address some points from the throne speech directly, I feel it is important I bring some attention to the unique aspects of my constituency. My district is home to an increasingly diverse set of industries. It has significant light and heavy manufacturing with production of products as varied as insulation and piping used in oil exploration. It is also home to some of Alberta's best agricultural land and some of Alberta's most productive farmers, but the industry, I must admit, I most enjoy talking about is the tourism industry and the beaches and lakes on which this industry is founded.

I am proud to boast that my constituency is home to three of the prettiest lake resorts in the province. One is Sylvan Lake. It is amongst the fastest growing communities in the province. In the past five years its year-round population has doubled, and the population multiplies by several times every summer when tourists come out to enjoy the many amenities offered at the lake. The huge amount of interest people have in Sylvan Lake these days is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that Sylvan Lake has the highest lakefront property prices in the province. Sylvan Lake also has the best known, and successful, summer hockey program in the province. Demand has been so high for this camp over the years that it's been a major reason why Sylvan Lake is now getting a new recreation centre with a swimming pool, a hockey rink, and a curling rink.

Mr. Speaker, Gleniffer Lake, located 20 miles west of Innisfail, is

another beautiful lake in my district that I wish to talk about this afternoon. It is known for being amongst the cleanest lakes in the province. It has two very successful RV parks and one RV campground.

The third lake I wish to refer to this afternoon, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure all members are familiar with because of the unfortunate recent incidents that took place near it, Pine Lake. Before referring to the tragic natural disaster that occurred there last summer, let me say that Pine Lake has long had and continues to have much to offer. Pine Lake is very dear to my heart. It has a beauty that can only be seen hidden away covered in luscious growth, blessed with innumerable sandy beaches. It truly is a gem. Over recent years Pine Lake has seen a large amount of sustainable, positive growth. It now has several campgrounds, condominium developments, and an 18-hole golf course.

One of the achievements at Pine Lake that deserves special attention has been the efforts of the local community to clean up the lake. In the 1980s, because Pine Lake was such an attractive and busy destination, it began to develop a water deterioration problem, as did many lakes in Alberta. The people of Pine Lake, the homeowners and the small business owners, decided to take action on the issue. They bound together and formed a group called the Pine Lake Restoration Society committed to improving the area. My predecessor, Gary Severtson, deserves credit for getting that society going and for what that society has accomplished. Early on, about 12 years ago, this committee began consultations with a variety of stakeholders to determine the most suitable method to clean the lake. Farmers, homeowners, campground owners, and scientists were each brought in to determine their perspective. Ultimately, the decision was made to utilize a hypolimnetic withdrawal system. It was a relatively inexpensive idea involving installing an underwater pipe.

What happened next shows the strong community spirit that existed in Pine Lake even after the disaster. The idea was there, but resources were scarce, so the community stepped forward in a remarkable way. People volunteered thousands of hours, and companies donated pieces of equipment to get the project done. Clean Lake Days was initiated, that fund-raised and informed the public about the project. In 1998 the project was completed ahead of schedule and underbudget. It truly is a remarkable success story.

There's another remarkable success story from Pine Lake that I would like to speak about, a success story that happened amidst a catastrophe. We are all aware of the terrible disaster that occurred last summer at Pine Lake. The tornado that hit Pine Lake left a human tragedy. Lives were lost, many were injured, and millions of dollars of damage occurred, but even with the destruction of the tornado, Mr. Speaker, it was remarkable to see the resolve and strength of the human spirit. The community banded together to help one another, and people from all across the province and the nation provided aid and support. It was truly moving to see the way everyone worked together to deal with the terrible aftermath of the tornado. I would like to acknowledge all of those that showed such boundless compassion and caring to those that were affected by the Pine Lake tornado. Thank you.

I would also like to acknowledge the role this government played in lending invaluable assistance in the wake of the disaster. To all the emergency staff, medical staff, counselors, and to many others that were at Pine Lake to help, I thank you. All of you truly went beyond the call of duty to help the people in this community.

The throne speech, Mr. Speaker, emphasized the need to develop safe, strong communities. I believe the response of the local Pine Lake community and the support received from across Alberta has demonstrated that this province is living up to that goal.

3:00

Another goal put forward in the throne speech that particularly relates to the situation in my riding is the goal to develop stable agricultural communities. Mr. Speaker, from what I hear from my neighbours in my constituency I know that agriculture is facing some very serious short-term and long-term challenges. The most pertinent issue is the poor harvest from last year compounded by the bottoming out of certain commodity prices and what looks like is going to be a year with exceptionally little moisture. For many farmers this follows years of poor harvests and years of struggling to make ends meet. The economic and human cost of the situation has the potential to be massive.

I am encouraged by the concern this government has taken thus far in confronting the matter. The Canada/Alberta farm income assistance program, recently reaffirmed with the introduction of this year's budget, is a step in the right direction towards alleviating some of the burden. Now all struggling producers will be eligible for a per acre assistance program.

I am also encouraged by the actions taken to find long-term solutions towards keeping agriculture competitive in Alberta. I am referring especially, Mr. Speaker, to efforts to reduce the risk of letting foot-and-mouth disease enter this province. As many of you are aware, it is a highly infectious disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals. It has the potential to wreak havoc on our agriculture industry if not contained, as it is currently doing in Europe. Alberta's efforts to inform producers how to minimize the possibility of its transfer, along with the other high standards Alberta has developed to keep our industry disease free and competitive, showed this province's determination to keep agriculture as a long-term sustainable industry in this province.

The assistance program and the actions on foot-and-mouth disease, Mr. Speaker, showed that this province recognizes the importance of agriculture, but we cannot lose this focus. More can be done and should be done. Agriculture has been at the heart of Alberta since long before it became a province. Producers play a special role. Their role is not only to provide for themselves through hard work and dedication to their fields and pastures; their role is also to provide sustenance for all people. They are at the root of a healthy province in terms of its ecological health and its economic health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to the throne speech this afternoon. I hope my fellow Assembly members now have an idea of the immense beauty that exists in my district both in terms of the geographical beauty and the spiritual beauty. Innisfail-Sylvan Lake truly is a scenic district with an increasingly diversified economy, but its greatest strength is the immense community spirit that drives on and has only become stronger in recent years. I also hope my fellow members have come to see that agriculture is important in my district, as it is in most parts of the province, and that in order to strengthen this historical and vital industry, it will need special attention from this government in the years ahead.

I am truly honoured to be a member of this Assembly. The next few years will be a challenge, I am sure, but it will be an exciting challenge. I look forward to working with all of you and doing my best to help strengthen our homes and our communities and to help keep Alberta as the exceptional place it is.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly a privilege and an honour to rise on this occasion and speak to this distinguished Assembly.

First let me congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and the Deputy Speaker on your respective elections. I have been pleased with the manner in which you handle your responsibilities. I also wish to congratulate all my colleagues in this Assembly for their willingness and commitment to serve the people of Alberta and on their re-election or election.

May I also congratulate our Premier on his election and acknowledge his leadership in putting Alberta in the enviable financial position it is in today and the positive leadership he has provided. I realize that he had help from the cabinet and other MLAs, so I thank you all and also those who helped that may not still be sitting in this Assembly. We as Albertans need to be grateful and appreciative of your efforts and appreciate this great province.

I am the second MLA to represent the newly amalgamated constituency of Cardston-Taber-Warner. The first was Ron Hierath, who decided not to seek re-election. I would like to publicly thank him for the service he rendered. He worked hard and is well known for his frankness, honesty, and integrity. He represented us well, and again I thank him for his service and dedication and wish him well in his future endeavours.

I also, Mr. Speaker, wish to compliment Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the warm, gracious manner in which she presented the Speech from the Throne. I sensed her sincerity and commitment to Albertans and thank her for her service.

Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to represent a very interesting constituency. Many of my colleagues have said that theirs is the best, which of course is debatable, but what I can truthfully say is that Cardston-Taber-Warner is the most southwesterly and may well be one of the most scenic. It includes Waterton park on the west, the towns of Cardston and Milk River to the east, and Warner, Raymond, Stirling, and Magrath in between. It also includes all of Cardston county, the county of Warner, and part of the MD of Taber.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the area, but natural gas and oil production is also increasing. Agriculture consists of ranching in the foothills, grain and oilseed farming on the prairies, and irrigated crops of sugar beets, potatoes, vegetables, corn, hay, and specialty crops. The production from these farms and ranches is the backbone of the huge intensive livestock industry that has developed in the south and also provides the production necessary for the value-added industry that is developing in the area. These industries in turn provide employment for many people and provide much economic benefit not only to our local economy but to all of Alberta.

Although our farmers and ranchers are industrious and independent, they have been challenged the past year by severe drought conditions, low grain and commodity prices, and high energy costs. The family farm, which has done a remarkable job of providing food for Albertans at a very low percentage of their disposable income, is under severe stress. When one considers that consumers in this province work on average only 40 days a year to buy their food and that about 10 days of that work goes directly to the producer, one has to admit that farmers and ranchers, most of which are family farms, have been very efficient in providing good, quality food for all of us.

The tragedy of this situation is that many of these family farms may not survive because of the aforementioned factors of low commodity prices, high energy costs, and drought. I believe it would serve all consumers well to help maintain the viability of our agriculture industry and to ensure that the family farm remains economically viable. I was pleased, therefore, that the Speech from the Throne noted that it would be a priority of this government to maintain the viability of our farms and rural communities.

3:10

I would also like to acknowledge the great contribution of our

rural communities – our towns, villages, counties, MDs – to the economic well-being of Alberta. These communities are very dependent on a strong agriculture economy for their well-being. Many small businesses in these communities are struggling, and some have even closed. Not only are they suffering because of the problems in agriculture, but the sudden massive increase in energy costs is presenting them with a huge challenge. Although most are grateful for the government rebate programs to assist them, most have still experienced significant increases in their energy bills. Given these challenges, it was comforting to note the government's commitment to responsible spending, low taxes, and elimination of debt. I commend the Premier and the government for their efforts in reducing taxes and helping Alberta to become a tax-free province.

Mr. Speaker, as a father and grandfather I am concerned about children and about learning. I applaud the government's commitment in the throne speech to increase funding to school boards to improve learning. I am pleased that school boards will have the autonomy they need to deal with local issues such as class size. I believe it is important to leave as much decision-making as possible at the local level. Furthermore, I believe we need to ensure that the Department of Learning listens to local boards, administrators, teachers, and parents to get their ideas on what is best for the students and to whenever possible implement these ideas and policies to improve the educational process.

I would like to recognize, Mr. Speaker, the dedicated effort of the teachers, parents, and administrators who teach and work in the Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency. I have visited with and been involved with many of these people and know of their dedication, commitment, and excellence. As a parent and legislator I congratulate and thank them for their efforts.

Health care is a challenge in my constituency, as it is in many others. Regionalization has reduced beds available and care provided in all of the rural hospitals in Cardston-Taber-Warner. Waiting lists for some people seem to be too long. Doctors and nurses and our health care workers work long and hard to provide quality care. It is a challenge to keep doctors and nurses in small rural communities. I recognize that regionalization has many benefits and that available medical technology cannot be delivered to all small hospitals, yet we must recognize the concerns of many rural people about their proximity to acute care and emergency service. Many rural people in Cardston-Taber-Warner live long distances from rural hospitals and much farther from large regional hospitals. One of the current issues affecting many of my people is that there is not at present a kidney dialysis machine available on a local basis to the people of Cardston.

The Cardston-Taber-Warner constituency is also privileged to have many senior citizens living within its boundaries. These people have worked hard and contributed greatly to the status of this great province. They deserve to be able to live with dignity and respect and to stay in their homes as long as possible and, if they need long-term care, to be able to remain as close as possible to their families. I was pleased to see the throne speech commitment to publicly funded health care and for the focus on access to health services, illness prevention, and effective regional governance. I applaud the decision to elect two-thirds of health board members in the municipal elections this fall.

Families and traditional family values are very important to the people of Cardston-Taber-Warner. People work hard to support families and communities. People work hard to support and help one another and to improve schools, churches, and hospitals. These are a people known for their voluntary community service and charitable support of each other. I was pleased to see the throne speech reinforce those values, values of hard work and caring for

others, confidence and innovation “that have guided Albertans throughout the province’s history, and they are the values that will continue to guide this government.”

In conclusion, I say that it is truly a humbling experience and an honour to have been elected to this position by my constituents. I thank them for the trust they have vested in me and pledge to them my commitment to undertake that trust. I also appreciate the kindness and friendliness that has been shown to me by you, Mr. Speaker, and also by my colleagues in this Assembly.

I believe that government should be open and responsible. I believe that the rights to life and property are truly inalienable rights and that governments exist to benefit people and that there is truth in the adage that the best government is that which governs least. Many of my constituents are concerned about some issues such as gun control, the taking of property without fair compensation – for example, the protection of endangered species – and high federal taxation. I believe that these people want us as a provincial government to do all we can to protect their rights and freedoms and to stand up to the federal government on these kinds of issues.

I know my constituents are appreciative of the efforts and progress the government has made in debt and tax reduction. They want us to continue this effort until the debt is paid and taxes are as low as possible and to continue to be fiscally responsible. They want us to be sensitive and responsive to the challenges being faced by rural Albertans, also to respect families and traditional family values, and to be innovative in encouraging and protecting the family and the children.

Alberta is a blessed province. It has great resources and good, hardworking people. Those who have gone before us have left us a great legacy. Our challenge is to move forward, to preserve those qualities of thrift, hard work, and traditional family values that got us here, and to be innovative and forward-thinking to successfully meet the challenges of the future.

I look forward to working co-operatively with my colleagues and fulfilling our promise to successfully meet the challenges ahead. May God bless Alberta and its people. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I now move adjournment of the debate on the Speech from the Throne.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 3
Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate April 24: Ms Blakeman]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments about Bill 3, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2001. The act itself is, of course, very specific and confines itself to one part of the fish management strategy that the government has undertaken.

When reading the bill, it reminded me of the comments that the Auditor General had made about the fish-stocking management in the province. I went back to review those comments, because it seems that that’s the context for this bill, that it is one part and a very small part of the fish-stocking management.

It was in 1993, I think, and 1994 that the Auditor General made a couple of recommendations in terms of fish-stocking management. The first was that the department set some measurable goals that

could be used to measure performance and to make sure that the kinds of activities that it was engaged in were ones that could be measured and that progress could be seen. The second was in terms of the information that the department has, and that was to acquire a better information base in terms of the fish stocks in the province.

3:20

I think one of the great concerns of the Auditor General is his attention to performance measures and making sure that those performance measures are specific and making sure that they are measurable. He addressed the last Auditor General’s report to that planning model, the one that’s been adopted by the department. It’s really made up of four components. First, a fish conservation strategy so that we’re actively trying to conserve the fish stocks that we have. The second part is a fish-stocking process for the province so that when stocks are replenished or added to, there’s a plan in place. The third part, an important part of the plan, was the recovery for individual species, that we go about trying to make sure there’s a plan in place to help those endangered species that we have in the province recover. The fourth part was that there be some specific action plans for various parts and areas of the province.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

The department put together a strategic plan, and part of that was the fish management information system that’s being used. The Auditor’s complaint, of course, is that the fish conservation strategy defines high-level goals and objectives. I think that he was making the point that there’s a need for more specific, lower level measurable objectives that would address the habitats, the maintenance, fish conservation, and fish use allocations. So he was arguing for some performance measures at a lower level.

He acknowledged that plans have been adopted for six species of fish in the province: walleye, northern pike, bull trout, golden trout, Arctic grayling, and lake sturgeon. The objective for the department has been “to recover collapsed and vulnerable populations and to sustain stable . . . ones,” and I think that’s an objective that we certainly all agree with. Taking that overall objective and then operationalizing it for the various regions I think was a concern that the Auditor General had in mind when he made the comments that he did.

He noted that there are six regions and 17 areas in the province, that the province has been subdivided for management purposes. He pointed out that within those different areas there are often differences in the kinds of performance objectives that the staff, depending on the nature of the staff, will pursue. I think he also acknowledged that each of the 17 areas has particular concerns that the management strategies have to address, and of course they will be peculiar to an area or to a region. He looked at the work of the managers, and as I was reading Bill 3, I wondered how Bill 3 was going to be monitored to fit into those plans and whether that would be part of a performance objective that we would see in this year’s or a future year’s business plans.

He went on to comment about the department’s plans at the regional and area levels and that there was a need for them to have some consistency. Many of them, he indicated, did not include enough information on the kind of staff that was going to be required or when particular activities were to be timed. Again he went back to the problem of performance measures.

He did indicate that many of the actions and many of the action plans did not seem to be consistent with the provincewide fish conservation strategy, which would seem to me to be a real weakness. He gave an example that “in only two of the seventeen area

Action Plans was the principle of no net loss of productive fish habitats mentioned.” This is, of course, the key principle in the fish conservation strategy. So he’s concerned about the planning, and I think those concerns about the planning are appropriately raised as we look at Bill 3 and the kinds of proposals that are in that bill.

I think an important part of his comment refers again, as I mentioned before, to staffing. He went on to indicate that in two of the areas “there was no fishery staff to manage the species,” and as a result there was no mention of the species in the plans. That seems to be unfortunate. If there’s no staff in place to do the work, then those important goals are abandoned and not acted upon. So concern about the staffing level and the action plans.

A further comment that he made about the action plans is that they had to be much more clearly expressed. This is a theme that I think runs throughout his remarks on the department in the last report he made, and that is a plea for clarity and a plea for having the operations well grounded in reality.

He gives a couple of examples of performance measures that, I take it, he thinks are inappropriate. For instance, he gives as an example: “Fisheries Resource is sustainable and resource is adequately conserved.” I think we’d all agree those are admirable objectives and goals for the department, but in terms of operation just exactly what does that mean? How are you going to know at the end of the year, at the end of the day whether you’ve made any progress on those two particular objectives? He again makes the plea in the report for the language to be more precise and for very, very specific performance measures to be articulated.

The problem, I guess, is that in many of the areas there’s inadequate staff and the staff that’s assigned doesn’t have the kind of time that’s needed to devote to planning. Yet I think we would all agree that consistent planning across the province is most desirable and that those regional and area plans are really very important. Staff has to have the time to develop the kinds of performance measures that the Auditor General has indicated and then have time to see what progress is being made on the measures that are articulated. The bottom line I think the Auditor General indicates is that without that kind of specific articulation of the goals and performance measures, without the staff in place to do the planning, without the staff in place to carry out the work, the habitat protection and natural reproduction could be compromised.

3:30

So as we look at Bill 3 and set the provisions of Bill 3, besides the kinds of comments that the Auditor General has raised, I think it does raise a concern that we can pass the best legislation in this Legislature, the most well-intentioned legislation, but if in reality there is not the staff in place, if the resources that are needed to carry out that legislation are not in place, that is all for naught. I think it’s a warning that as this new legislation passes through the House and is enacted, that has to be taken seriously, and we’ll be looking closely at the business plans of the department when we look at budget estimates to ensure that the resources that make the provisions of Bill 3 possible are in place and that there is adequate staff for them to be able to do their job.

I think with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I’d like to conclude and look forward to the bill as it moves on through to committee stage. Thanks very much.

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

DR. TAFT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. As I look through the bill and consider its implications, I can’t help thinking of many years of

experiences on Lake Wabamun and the history of Lake Wabamun as a sort of miniature example of the entire fish ecosystem in Alberta, and I’m concerned that Bill 3, you know, while it’s okay in principle, really isn’t going to do very much to protect Alberta’s fish stock. If you go to a small museum at Seba Beach – and I’d recommend it to anybody on a day’s drive – you’ll see in there newspaper articles posted up from the 1950s which indicate how extensive the fish stocks in Lake Wabamun and in other Alberta lakes were. Through the winters in the 1950s the whitefish supply in Lake Wabamun was so extensive that it actually supported an export industry to New York, and Alberta fish were served in the finest restaurants in New York. Today you’re lucky to catch anything in Lake Wabamun, really, except maybe an infection. So I’m concerned that this bill nibbles around the edges and, you know, if we’re going to have a bill with a real bite, then we’re going to have to take some more steps to protect fish stocks.

I think some of the other issues that I’d like to see incorporated in an effort to protect fish stocks have to do, for example, with forestry and forestry cutting right down to stream edges and lakesides, which disrupts the banks of the streams and causes extensive damage and disruption to the stream flows and indeed to the lakesides.

I’m also concerned about agricultural runoff, like many of us here. I’m sure we’ve boated and canoed on Alberta rivers. I’ve canoed down the Red Deer River through agricultural land. Frankly, it’s very disconcerting to watch the runoff of silt and manure and chemicals from agricultural activity into rivers and streams. Again, I suspect that’s at least as major a contribution to declining fish stocks in Alberta as is sportfishing. At least I’d be interested to see some study on that.

I’m also very concerned about stream crossings for trucks, oil trucks, forestry trucks, and cattle. It’s not uncommon in Alberta for streams just to be driven across without regard for protecting the banks, without any effort at building bridges. Again the stream flows are disrupted. There’s silting that occurs. There’s weed growth that occurs, and that damages fish stocks.

Another concern, of course, is hydro development and the impact of hydro development on the flow of rivers and their ability to sustain spawning fish having to move upstream past large hydro projects.

Yet another concern – and this is very effective – at Lake Wabamun is the concern over power plant effluents going into lakes either directly or indirectly through cooling ponds. I’ve already had constituents approach me with very detailed analyses of the impact of the Wabamun power plant on that lake. I should note that the word “Wabamun” is actually, I’m told, the Cree word for looking glass. It was at one time such a beautiful lake. It reminded the Cree of a looking glass. Of course, now if you go out there, what you see in the looking glass are several major power plants and a whole host of major strip mines.

The power plant at Wabamun, I am told – and I would be interested in information on this from the government – and I’ve seen figures to support this, routinely exceeds the federal guidelines for heat effluents into a lake, and the weed growth in parts of Lake Wabamun is choking the lake and killing off the fish stocks. Likewise, the lake is surrounded by huge, utterly huge coal strip mines, which have completely disrupted the watershed of the lake.

So that kind of industrial activity, which can be illustrated at Lake Wabamun but occurs, for example, around the oil sands developments in northeastern Alberta and around other lakes, is certainly of great concern. If we’re really serious about protecting fish stocks, we should be looking at that.

Those are some of my concerns over where Bill 3 fails to go anywhere far enough if we’re serious about protecting fish stocks.

A different kind of concern I have is simply hinted at in the legislation. It will be interesting to see how the regulations proceed, but a concern over a trend to pay for what you fish. Fishing goes back to the beginnings of human habitation in Canada and in Alberta, and it has always been something that people do freely. My sons fish with their grandfather, who himself is a farmer and who loves fishing. They fish with their uncles, and it's something that's done as a public heritage of Alberta.

If I contrast that, for example, to Britain, it's a remarkable contrast. What's happened in Britain is that access to streams is, in fact, privately controlled. You can't just go fishing on a stream or a river in Britain unless you own the land that abuts the stream or the river. They've lost that whole heritage of public fishing in Britain, and I would hate for that to occur here through licensing and regulations and the encouragement of privatization of a public heritage in Alberta.

With those comments, I'll wrap up my reactions in principle to Bill 3, to simply encourage the government to take much further and more thoughtful steps towards protecting what is a great heritage in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to close debate.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the opposition for the comments they've made. We had an opportunity, of course, to file the answers to what they had asked previously. We filed those today for their information and the information of the public. Again, I will have my staff review the *Hansard* and then provide in writing the answers to those questions.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

3:40

Bill 4
Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001

[Adjourned debate April 24: Ms Blakeman]

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

DR. MASSEY: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 4, the Surface Rights Amendment Act, 2001. If you look at the principles on which the bill has been structured, it seems that one of those principles, at least, is that fair compensation for damages as a result of the actions of oil, gas, and mineral companies should be available through the board. I think it's a good move. In essence, the act moves the amount that they are able to award from a limit of \$5,000 to a limit of \$25,000, and I think that that will be useful.

The Surface Rights Board has a useful role to play in trying to resolve disputes between occupants or landowners and oil, gas, and mineral companies, and they, I think, have a fairly good record of being able to work at solutions and avoid at least two things. One is more costly legal battles that might have to be undertaken by aggrieved occupants, and second, it's freed up room in Provincial Court. It hasn't burdened the courts with matters that can be resolved elsewhere.

It's an important bill, Mr. Speaker, for landowners. I refer to an experience in our own family with a well being placed on farm property south of the city and a concern that that raised in terms of farming the land. Well, there were a whole host of concerns that ranged from where the access roads were going to be located to the

relocation of fences. The problem of noise was raised and even the problem of aesthetics, where the tanks and equipment were going to be located on the property. Agreement was arrived at rather quickly with the company, but in other cases that wasn't the case. This gives those landowners with similar concerns an opportunity to be reimbursed without having to resort to the courts, and it gives the board, of course, much more flexibility with the raised limits to respond to specific items that are raised by landowners.

The work of the board is rather interesting. If you look at the kinds of requirements of board members, I think it's encouraging that one of the requirements is that they have a good grasp of the law covering expropriation and surface rights so that they know the kinds of problems that landowners and occupants will bring before them and that they have the ability to write concise definitions based on the law. So being able to take the law and interpret it when occupants come forward with cases is an important attribute of those board members and, of course, working knowledge of the related acts: the Surface Rights Act and the Expropriation Act and other acts that might impact decisions. So there's a real concern that board members who are making these decisions are knowledgeable, and that's rightfully so because for a small landowner who is facing trying to negotiate with a large company, it can be an overwhelming task. So I think it's good, when they appear before that board, that their case will be listened to by individuals who are knowledgeable and are able to make decisions that are well grounded in terms of the law of the province. Also, now with this bill those same board members will have an opportunity for a wider range of options in terms of responding to the concerns of occupants.

With those few comments, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to conclude. It's a small change to the act and one that I support. Thanks very much.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to close debate.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'd like to thank the opposition for their questions, and of course I'll have my department officials review *Hansard* and provide the answers in writing. I will again table those in the House for all the people that are interested.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move to adjourn debate on Bill 4.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Has the minister moved a motion to adjourn debate or close debate?

MR. CARDINAL: Close debate.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Close debate. Okay. For clarification it's for closing debate.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 7
Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

[Debate adjourned April 26: Dr. Massey speaking]

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise with a range of comments on this particular bill. I do think it's a step in the right direction, and I would like to make that clear. We've been waiting for some clarification on the election of regional health authorities for a long time, and this is a step in that direction. It would be nice

to have more detail on the regulations that will be guiding these elections. The minister has provided a media release which does indicate that there will be guidelines for these elections in some ways similar to what we as MLAs face. It would be nice to see more detail on that, but I'll take him at his word that these will be implemented, and I think that's a good step.

I would like here to note experience on these kinds of elections in the United States, a recent experience in Massachusetts which actually gives me some cause for concern. There were particular interests that wanted to influence the outcome of the health care elections in Massachusetts, and a number of individual businesses and corporations contributed each between \$100,000 and \$250,000 to campaigns to ensure that their particular point of view was victorious. I think we need to be very mindful of those kinds of developments occurring one way or another directly or indirectly in Alberta.

3:50

Though Bill 7 is a step in the right direction, it is only one step of what I think needs to be a much longer journey, and I think there will be some debate in the ensuing days and weeks over the nature of that journey as series of questions arise around the RHA elections. One is pretty obvious, I think, to everybody who looks at it. Why are we electing only two-thirds of the members of the boards? Do we only have two-thirds of a commitment to democracy? We don't apply that to municipal councils or county councils or school boards or other councils. Why are we choosing to limit democracy to only two-thirds of the members of a regional health authority? It makes me wonder how much democracy would be too much. If 66 percent is acceptable, is 68 percent too much or 70 percent too much or 75 percent too much? I'm not sure why we just don't elect regional health authority boards, period. There is nothing terribly wrong with democracy. It has its flaws, but as a number of noteworthy people have said, it's better than all the alternatives.

I'm also concerned that by only electing two-thirds of members, we are setting up situations in which there will be factions on boards. There'll be the elected faction, who will always be able to claim a legitimacy that the appointed faction will not have. There are risks of boards degenerating into divisiveness and friction and claims over whose rightful control should be exercised. I do think that in situations like this appointed members will lack a legitimation that is so fundamental in democracy, and indeed the minister will, I think, certainly find himself in a situation where candidates who have received thousands of votes through a duly followed electoral process will be pushed aside for a ministerial appointee. I do think that's a slap in the face for democracy and may be a problem for the minister when the situation arises. As only two-thirds of a democratic body I think there is a risk that these will be in many ways sort of paper authorities.

I also note that the minister reserves the right to appoint the chairman of each regional health authority, and as I understand it, that will be after the election. So as well as appointing a third of the members, the minister will be appointing the chairman, and I have to again ask: why is that? Is the government that frightened about what the general population believes they need to put those kinds of controls in? What legitimacy will the chairman have when he's appointed as a ministerial appointment, inevitably to be seen as a political position, when he or she will face a number of elected members who may challenge his legitimacy? Again I would point out that school boards choose their own chairman after the election, as I understand it, and of course in city councils mayors are elected at large through their own democratic process. So why the double standard for regional health authorities? We're tinkering around and

meddling in democracy in a dangerous way. I wish the minister would address these issues. On the tax issue the ability for school boards to control their tax revenues has been virtually eliminated, yet we allow them to be fully elected.

As I understand it, the payment to members on regional health authorities is \$10,000 per year, and it does seem to me to be a very small amount given the scale of responsibility that these people have. It's a smaller amount than major school boards pay to their trustees and certainly a smaller amount than municipal governments in cities pay to their trustees and this despite the fact that regional health authorities are actually typically larger. For example, the Calgary regional health authority, I understand, has a larger budget and more employees than the city of Calgary itself. It's an enormous organization. We are putting on the shoulders of these elected members huge responsibility. I think the least they deserve is a compensation that reflects that and is similar to people in parallel positions.

I'm also concerned about a particular section of Bill 7. I believe it's section 4(4), and I'm sure the minister will be able to explain this. The section allows, as I understand it, members of medical staff, employees, and their families to run for the regional health authorities. Again I think that the minister may be able to correct my perception, but as I understand it, this means that, say, a nurse or an employee of a regional health authority may well be able to serve actively on the board of that authority or that a medical officer, maybe the head of a medical department in a health authority, will also be able to serve and run for a position on that health authority. That does set off, I think, a dangerous situation, a potential, indeed probably a real conflict of interest. I'm sure that's not the minister's intention, so I would like some clarification on section 4(4) of Bill 7.

As I was saying in my opening comments, this is a step in the right direction. After years of waiting there is some advance towards RHA elections, and I commend the government for taking that step. I am and I think probably most Albertans also will be disappointed that the steps are not more decisive and more extensive, simply are too timid to really make a sufficient difference here.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will wait for the next round of debates and also, I think, wait for the minister's responses, which may be in a written form, which getting from the Minister of Environment on earlier bills were very helpful.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to finally get to speak this afternoon regarding the election of regional health authorities. This has been a campaign that certainly is overdue. With the billions and billions of tax dollars that are spent in providing public health care to the citizens of this province, the only way to ensure that that money is being wisely spent is to have an openness and also the concept of accountability. Public officials that are elected are of course accountable to those who walk into the closet where the ballot box is located. However, we need to look at this whole idea of electing regional health authority officials. This has been batted around since 1994, and at one point a former minister of health in the debate said that it just wasn't possible because of political sensitivities, I believe was the description, for another cancellation of the proposed regional health authorities.

Now, people in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar would say that we elect school board officials; what's the matter with regional health authorities? Of course, they have a very, very valid

point. In fact, allowing two-thirds of all board members to be elected is a step in the right direction, but one-third will remain appointed. This disappoints me, because in the spirit of openness and the spirit of accountability and in regards to the huge sums of money – the Capital health authority is the fourth largest employer, I believe, in the entire province, with thousands and thousands of employees. So one more level of governance is fine.

4:00

When you consider that the whole debate surrounding this election will be public, that there are going to be, I assume, forums, that there will be town hall meetings, that the positions of the various candidates will be recorded, that their comments will be noted and probably published in newspapers, that their views on the direction that the public health care system will take in the next three years will probably be discussed in various media outlets, then for the minister to take all of this into account with the appointment of the chair of each individual board – I don't know if that's the right thing to do, because I think the board themselves, not the hon. minister, should appoint the chair, for those specific reasons.

There may be one individual that has a specific view on, for instance, let's say Bill 11. Now, I encouraged all citizens of this province who were active in the Bill 11 debate to please consider running for the regional health authority positions. It is my view that this is the one last check and balance that will be available if the regional health authorities decide that they're going to use Bill 11 for the purpose that it was intended, and that was to contract out insured services, contract out our public health care system.

Now, there may be people on the board after the election who believe that the economics of this is unwise, that it's not a sound use of tax dollars. We see the increase, always in the health care budget, but that is not being currently reflected in an increase in patient services. We're putting a lot of money back in there, and we have to wait and see if it is going to be well spent. I certainly hope that the regional health authorities are not going to get frustrated, and they're going to say: well, the answer is certainly Bill 11. The board of directors for the health authorities will be under pressure, but the comforting thing with the election, Mr. Speaker, of the regional health authority boards is that they can stand up and speak out if they see quietly the contracting out, the privatization of core health care services to private providers whether they be corporations that are registered here in Alberta or what are called HMOs in America.

I heard a consumer activist, Mr. Speaker, describe the HMOs as, "Hand money over before you get health care." That was his definition of the HMOs. Certainly the whole debate around the free trade agreement and if we're going to allow a company from Calgary or a company from Edmonton to bid on these contracts, then we're going to have to allow a company from Nashville or from Charlotte or from New York City even to have that same opportunity – that's coming. But this is why at this time I support the elections, even if it's only two-thirds of the regional health authorities. They're long overdue.

Now, certainly I hope that the first purpose of an elected authority will be as a watch dog to make sure that the real intentions of Bill 11 do not come out. You go back seven years, when the public first saw a system of decentralization and the setting up of the 17 regional health authorities and the two separate health boards, and we saw all this unfold. We are still looking at the difficulties that there are between various regions and the transfer of service. It remains to me a mystery when a person, for instance, who lives in Hinton and receives health care in Edmonton just exactly what sort of agreements there are between regional health authorities, how one health authority bills another. How does this exactly work?

If we have an election of the majority of directors – well, hopefully it'll be the majority – how will this affect transfers between regions? Hopefully it is going to get a lot less complex, and hopefully they can work together, because that has been the problem in the past. It has been very difficult.

You've got to look at Edmonton and Calgary. You've got to look at the contributions at the universities and the fact that teaching hospitals are located there. There are a lot of specialists in both Calgary and Edmonton whereas in some smaller centres there are not. What sort of co-operation will go on between elected officials? If someone, for instance, Mr. Speaker, in Hinton has to have heart surgery, how is this going to work? If there is a senior living in Valleyview and that senior wants to be transferred by younger members of their family to the Capital region for long-term care, hopefully, it will be easier. Elected officials can converse and hopefully can solve a lot of problems that do go on with regionalization.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when we think of the 17 regions, I don't see provisions in this bill – and the hon. minister can certainly shed light on this. If we are to change the boundaries, what exactly will happen? As I understand it, the minister decides on electoral divisions. Let's, for instance, say that perhaps we're going to go down to six regional health authorities, that we're going to change from 17 to six. This is certainly a number that has been bandied around. There was a number similar to that with The Rainbow Report. There certainly weren't 17 regions. It could be simply that 17 regions were the number that we came up with because of political considerations. I know that if you visit the Association of Registered Nurses, they have a map up in their office, and they have the province divided up into six regions – I'm quite sure it's six – so that their representatives can get around to meet members of their professional association.

4:10

So what would happen if suddenly we decided that we were going to have six regions? Now, what would drive this, or what would be the issue that would lead to, say, the formation of six regional health authorities and how would this affect the elections? What happens if, say, we're going to have two or possibly three, if private companies who would be quite willing if they got the chance under Bill 11 to contract out for insured services thought to themselves, "Well, we've got to qualify for all of the 17 different regions, but if there were only six or if there were only three regions, then we would have a much better chance of being able to provide this service."

Now, all the boards of directors are elected, and suddenly they're put out of work. What guarantee is there that there will continue to be the 17 different regions? We can go through all this process, elect them all at considerable expense, and then suddenly these jobs are redundant, because, well, we're going to reorganize this again. I have a concern about that, and hopefully in the course of this debate we will receive answers. Perhaps there is going to be no further reorganization.

In my remarks this afternoon I would like to speak briefly about the whole issue of conflict of interest. The perception exists that regional health authority CEOs and other high-ranking administrators are friends of the government. That's the perception. That was the perception that was around in Bill 11. I used to have town halls, open forums, and citizens would come up to me with this newspaper article and that newspaper article and say: "Look at this, Mr. MacDonald. What do you think of this?" I would read it, and I would try my best to get back to them. They were concerned about this intricate little web that had been created. The positions of friends of the government are more about patronage than sound fiscal policy or quality health care.

Now, let's compare for a minute, Mr. Speaker, the two regional

health authorities, the two largest ones, Calgary and Edmonton. The CEOs of both of them are very, very hard working. I can't for the life of me, unless I want to look at this – this is how it has been brought to my attention, as an issue of gender. They both have equally the same budgets, but the CEO in Calgary – and I know it cost a lot to park a car in downtown Calgary; I know that. But I don't think the CEO in Calgary should get I believe it is in excess of \$80,000 more than the CEO here at the Capital health authority. I'm just not going to put that down to the high cost of downtown parking in Calgary.

Someone said to me: oh, it's just gender discrimination. I do not believe that that is true, but why the difference? Maybe when we elect the boards, they're going to end this. I certainly know that the Capital health authority CEO works very, very hard, and I think the health care delivery system in this region is grateful for her work and her diligence. Certainly the leadership that has been provided there has gotten us through some rough times.

This is another issue, conflict of interest.

As I understand it, not everyone is going to be eligible to run in the election in their home area. We were looking at a description here: "is an employee of a hospital or nursing home in respect to which the election is being held." Well, I go back to the AUMA conference that I attended two years ago, when there was a resolution put forward I believe from an area north of the city here. This resolution talked about not allowing members of unions, particularly health care unions, to run in the regional health authority elections if and when they did happen. Well, now they're happening, and it looks to me that these individuals are no longer going to be allowed to run. Perhaps we can look at this perception that already exists with regional health authority CEOs and other high-ranking administrators and how exactly this is going to work and how long it is before there's a court challenge with this, because I'm sure there will be one. Someone is going to feel that because of their employment they're not allowed to participate fully in the democratic process. Has the hon. minister any concern about that? If there are any records in his department regarding this, I think it would be to the benefit of all members of the Assembly if they were shared with us, because it certainly is interesting that we're going to make a list of those who are not eligible.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that even if it is only two-thirds of regional health authorities that are going to be elected, it's a step in the right direction. I would again encourage all individuals across this province who are interested in further development of our public health care system to participate in the elections, and I am looking forward very much this fall to hearing the comments and the platforms of the various candidates as they come forward for these positions. I think it is vital, again, with so much public money being spent on the provision of health care, that all health authorities be elected.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Before I call upon the next speaker, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, may we briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly two guests very special to me seated in the members' gallery. One is a lady I've known for over 30 years. She's been very supportive and very kind and tolerant of me. She happens to be my wife, Linda. The other one is my daughter Paula. They came today to hear my maiden speech. Fortunately, they missed it. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm greetings of this Assembly.

Thank you.

head: **Government Bills and Orders**
Second Reading

Bill 7

Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act, 2001

(continued)

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

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the government's Bill 7, the Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act. The act provides for a number of things. Particularly what it provides is amendments to what the government and the minister can do through regulation, and that is the problem that we have with this bill. It's a good idea that at least two-thirds of the members are going to be elected, finally fulfilling a campaign promise that had not been kept for a number of years. Now it's being partially kept by the government, and that, I think, is something that we could be grateful for, but there are a number of concerns that I have with the bill nevertheless.

4:20

It will permit the government to continue to appoint one-third of the members. Now, it's interesting how they can do that. They will be able to appoint the chairs of the regional health authorities, which will go a great distance towards allowing the government appointees to set the agenda for the other two-thirds of the elected people.

The government will appoint people to these boards after the elections are held. The government will then be in a position to survey the makeup of the elected members of these regional health authorities, and it will allow them, then, to determine which people are going to be appointed. They can ensure, I think, through those means a rather high degree of control over the activities of these boards, notwithstanding the fact that they have committed in principle to the elected principle of operation of these organizations.

Now, why would the government want to retain control? Why doesn't the government trust the people locally to make the right decision for their health authority? Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, the answer, at least from my perspective, is clear. The government does not want to lose control of the operations of the regional health authorities, and they are afraid that the unlimited exercise of democracy in this area will in fact put them at risk of losing control. Now, why would they be afraid of losing control?

Well, clearly the government has and continues to have a privatization agenda in the health care system. [interjections] Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The government wants to continue with its privatization agenda, and they are afraid of the people. They are afraid that the people will not elect people to these local health authorities that will further their agenda. [interjections] I'm glad that this Assembly is not as sleepy as it was a few moments ago. I'm glad that people are waking up all over the Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's very clear that the government does not want to have transparency in the operation of these health authorities

either. We now have a situation that almost every aspect of the operation of the health authorities is being set not in the act by the Legislature but in fact by the government through its regulation power.

Now, I just happened to pull up, Mr. Speaker, the Local Authorities Election Act, and it specifies in legislation, not through regulation, a huge range of the operations of elections with respect to municipal government in our province, as it should. These are things that ought to be done by the Legislature because they govern who will and who will not be elected to a body that is supposed to be democratically elected. Just some examples: it sets the ballot boxes; it sets voting subdivisions; it sets rules of residency; it ensures that there's secrecy of vote. It goes through a whole range of things, and it specifies them very clearly in legislation so the whole process is completely transparent.

The regulations for democratic government, no matter how insignificant, Mr. Speaker, ought to be made by the Legislative Assembly or the Parliament of Canada through open and public debate and not behind closed doors at the cabinet table or in the minister's office. This entire act, the Regional Health Authorities Act, is a monument, a testament to the power of government operating behind closed doors without reference to the Legislative Assembly.

Particularly worrying is the authority for the cabinet to set regulations regarding contributions and election finances. There's no transparency here. We all know that the rules around contributions and election finances have a huge impact on who is and who is not able to get elected. A party or an individual with a huge cash war chest will regularly outperform parties or individuals who have meager resources, which is really the only reason there are so many over there and so few here, Mr. Speaker. Now, the government understands that very well. The government understands the role of finances in elections very well, and that's why they're going to reserve setting the rules around the health authorities for themselves. I'm very worried that we might have on the health authorities every right-wing nut in Alberta after this next election if the government is allowed to set all of the rules behind closed doors.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to express some concerns about the ward boundaries here. We haven't even seen what the ward boundaries are going to be. This is another thing that the government is going to do behind closed doors: set the wards. So where's the transparency, where's the democracy if this cabinet can by order in council determine precisely and in exactly which way they're going to set electoral boundaries, who the chair is going to be, who one-third of the members are going to be, how the election finances are going to be handled? It's not open, it's not transparent, and it's not democratic. Why are we rushing through this bill without an open disclosure and discussion of what the ward boundaries are going to be?

Another question that arises, Mr. Speaker, is the question of assistance for municipalities. Municipal governments have always had to carry out local elections. Whether their government wants to have a phony election for the Senate or whether they want to have elections for school boards, it doesn't matter. The municipalities are responsible for organizing, conducting, and paying for the election. It's high time that the government made a commitment financially to our municipalities to help offset the cost of these elections as they continue to load and load and load more and more elections on the municipalities and require them to carry them out.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to just indicate that I think this entire act, including the act which is amended by this act, is woefully inadequate, is a slap in the face to democratic principles. The government, if it was serious about fulfilling its campaign promise

made a long time ago to have these health authorities fully elected, would bring forward legislation that would in a transparent fashion allow for the election by all citizens of the entire health authority, and they would ensure that all of the regulations were replaced with legislation when it comes to questions of ward boundaries, election contributions, eligibility, and all of those things. Those are not the things in a democratic society that ought to be done behind closed doors around a cabinet table. It is an affront to the parliamentary democracy that we defend.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to close debate.

MR. MAR: I have nothing further to add, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a second time]

head: **Government Bills and Orders** **Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We'll call the committee to order.

4:30

Bill 1 **Natural Gas Price Protection Act**

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

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I've been waiting to discuss this bill in a little bit more detail: Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, from the *Calgary Herald* of 1974. Again, for all members of the Assembly, I'm astonished that a flagship piece of legislation has been adopted from the first paragraph of a *Calgary Herald* editorial. I can't see any need for this Natural Gas Price Protection Act that already doesn't exist in legislation, specifically the Natural Gas Rebates Act. Also, upon further investigation there are specific provisions in the Gas Utilities Act and also in the Gas Resources Preservation Act.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, I believe that this bill has been so hastily drafted after the election that definition (c) "marketable gas" as defined in the Oil and Gas Conservation Act is also the same definition that is in the Gas Resources Preservation Act. So obviously this bill was drafted in haste. That is one more indication that it was drafted in haste and pretending, whenever it was drafted, that it was concerned about consumer relations.

Now, the whole concept of price protection is discussed in section 2. How exactly is this going to be determined? The government already has the legislative authority to set gas prices in the Gas Utilities Act, part 1. It goes into a great deal of difficulty, Mr. Chairman. We can even list some of them. "The just and reasonable price or prices to be paid for gas" can be determined, et cetera,

- (ii) before it has been delivered into any gas pipeline;
- (iii) before it has been subjected to treating or processing by absorption or otherwise for the extraction from it of natural gasoline or other hydrocarbons;
- (iv) before it has been purified . . . [or]
- (v) at any point on a gas pipeline.

So I don't understand how this can be presented with much fanfare to Albertans as something new, something novel, or even necessary.

It's bad legislation. There's only one thing you can do, and that is try to improve it. Certainly you can try to improve it through

debate, through discourse. It's an important issue, with millions and millions of dollars being transferred to consumers, to distribution systems in the form of rebates, I should say. So what exactly are we doing here?

Now, the national residential gas reference price. We're going to tie our natural gas price to a national price, and this is how this reads, Mr. Chairman, in section 5:

The Minister of Energy may, with respect to delivered marketable gas, publish from time to time a national residential gas reference price, based on such factors as the Minister considers appropriate.

Well, we all know, Mr. Chairman, that there have been record natural gas prices in the year 2000 as growth and demand outpaced growth and supply. Prices increased steadily throughout the year and by year-end had quadrupled over 1999 year-end prices. Now, Canadian producers responded by substantially increasing investments in land purchase. There were many gas wells drilled; that was noted this afternoon in question period. The majority of these gas wells were located in the conventional areas of the western sedimentary basin. There were developments in the Northwest Territories. Members are going to say: what does that have to do with us? There were developments on the east coast that resulted in two new sources of supply. Well, here in section 5 we are getting tied to what goes on across the country. You look at what happened in Fort Liard; there were some excellent wells up there. There was gas discovered offshore in Nova Scotia. How this is going to be done: I think we have to have answers at this stage of the debate, Mr. Chairman.

When you look at the entire Canadian natural gas market, Canadian natural gas sales – and this is where we're going to have to be very careful – have been estimated to have increased by 4 and a half percent in the year 2000, following a 3.6 percent increase in the year 1999. Growth was broadly based across the residential, the commercial, and the industrial sectors, but consumption in electricity generation also increased. So, now, without any discussion, are we allowing in this bill as it stands now, Mr. Chairman, a subsidy for generators of electricity who fuel their plants with natural gas? We're told time after time after time that we're out of the business of being in business, but the potential for that exists in this legislation. The potential is real. It's a reality.

This sudden rise in natural gas commodity prices obviously placed a heavy financial burden or cost on these homeowners, these commercial establishments, or these industrial facilities. There's no doubt about that. Each member of this Assembly has heard or will hear about this at their constituency office and probably phone calls to here. But there needs to be an understanding, and I don't think the understanding has come forward in the debate so far, of just what exactly the Minister of Energy is going to do here in respect to national prices.

Now, where will this lead? We're contemplating spending millions and millions of dollars. There's \$125 million, I believe, allocated for further rebates. Considering that we've spent billions, I have to question how much more we're going to need.

4:40

We also have to question current production rates of natural gas not only, again, in this province but across the country. Also reserves: I note here that the initial reserves in billion cubic metres in Alberta – and these are figures that come from the AEUB – were around 3,919. This is a year ago, and of those reserves remaining, again in billions of cubic metres, it is 1,207. Now, that's in Alberta. So we have roughly a little bit more than 25 percent, or one-quarter, of those initial reserves left.

Prices are hardly going to go down. I'm not at this time, Mr. Chairman, going to go into the issue of natural gas and air condition-

ers and the consumption of electricity by the air conditioners in America and the fact that the rivers – or as it's described as the potential for hydraulic generation of electricity in northwestern America – are diminished because there's no water or the flow rates in the rivers has been substantially reduced by drought.

Canadian natural gas production in the last year recorded, in 2000, totaled 174 billion cubic metres. That was 2 percent more than the year before, but gas well completions in the year 2000 increased by 41 percent. I believe the Premier talked about this in question period today, the increase in drilling activity in our western sedimentary basin. The largest increase of all of this occurred in southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan where the wells tend to be shallower. Of course, they're cheaper to drill and can be placed into production quickly. So it's much cheaper to drill a well there than, say, west of Hinton or out in Obed, somewhere like that, where you're going really deep. It can get very, very expensive in the foothills. Shallow wells account for about 70 percent of overall gas well completions in western Canada, so we're making the money. The producers are anxious to make money, and they're anxious to make money now.

It is up to the government – and this bill certainly doesn't do it – to ensure that there is some long-term planning. Again, this gas protection act, as it's called, doesn't do it, Mr. Chairman.

Now, earlier in my remarks I talked about subsidizing electricity generators. There are two outfits that come from across the border that are currently or contemplating building natural gas generating stations, and for the life of me I cannot understand, with this legislation as it exists, how their fuel source can be subsidized by the taxpayers of this province. At this point, I just cannot agree with that.

Whenever the minister is talking about having this reference price in section 5, we also have to look at exactly where we will be with natural gas exports and imports. In the year 2000 in this country exports of our natural gas reached a record 100 billion cubic metres, and that is again an increase from the previous year. If you look at it, in five years there has been an increase of 23 percent. Now, I think we could look at better ways of protecting consumers than this bill and this mystical price reference that the minister is considering. It's based on factors that not an hon. member in this Assembly knows anything about, that I'm aware of.

When you look at export sales, where did the gas go when it cleared the border at either Kingsgate or Emerson or even Monchy? Where did it go? The distribution, as I understand it, went somewhere like this: 37 percent to the midwest, 28 percent to the northeast, 19 percent to California, and 14 percent to the Pacific Northwest. So Mr. Chairman, 33 percent of Canada's export of natural gas went to places that are already experiencing electrical shortages. That was last year. That's how much gas we have exported to that part of America.

Now, the Pacific Northwest certainly has generating capacity, but California does not. How is our price here going to go way down with conditions that exist such as there are in California? I don't think it's going to happen, and this bill is simply a credit card with no spending limit on it for the Minister of Energy. What will happen? I don't think export volumes will decline. They may in the northeast part of America, but that's so far removed from us that I don't think it's going to matter. I think prices are going to remain very, very high in comparison to what they were, and if this bill is to make up the difference, it is going to be a real drain on the provincial treasury. It's just going to be a real drain. The hon. minister before talked about really sharp price increases. Well, this is going to be a real drain on the treasury.

Now, the substantial increases I mentioned in natural gas prices in North America are reflected domestically here in our price. The

average price of Canadian natural gas exports at the international border in 2000 rose by about 68 percent. That's a big price increase, 68 percent, Mr. Chairman. What will happen? These higher export volumes and higher prices for Canadian gas translate into increased revenue, and this is an argument that, I'm sure, will be made by the Minister of Energy: the increased revenue from natural gas exports. We can pay for anything with that revenue, anything at all. We can have an unlimited rebate.

Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman's Ruling Decorum

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Just excuse me one second, please. The chair is experiencing a lot of difficulty hearing, so we would appreciate it if everyone would tone down the noise level. I would also appreciate that members take a seat and sit down. There should be only one person standing and speaking. That'll be much appreciated. Thank you.

You may proceed.

Debate Continued

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I talked earlier about this concept of an electrical subsidy to electrical power producers, which I don't agree with. I've heard before this whole notion, this calm assurance that we're out of the business of being in business. When you look at the electricity production in this province, it is simply not true whenever people express the belief that 35 percent of the generating capacity in this province comes from natural gas. It's not that high. It's not nearly that high. The maximum that it could be is 22 percent. You know, people are forgetting that we've got dams, a couple of good dams, one at Brazeau, one out in the riding of Rocky Mountain House. There's certainly capacity there to generate electricity.

We need to look at what happened in Alberta last year and at the transfers of electricity. Now, Alberta imported electricity from three locations – from B.C., from Saskatchewan, and also from America, incredibly – according to the information that I have received. From America we received about 50 gigawatt-hours. Interestingly enough, we received the majority from B.C., 837 gigawatt-hours. From Saskatchewan we received 327 gigawatt-hours. Because of the high cost of electricity there has been a considerable amount of . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired] I'm going to have to continue with my remarks in a minute.

4:50

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments about Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act. I didn't have the opportunity at second reading, so I have a number of comments that I'd like to make.

Of course, we're into the details of the bill, and Bill 1 is really a very interesting bill, not in terms of the substance of it, I suspect, because I think we're all aware of that, but in terms of what isn't in the bill or what's provided for through regulations. More than half of the bill, of course, is devoted to regulations, and I think it was timely that a former colleague, the Member for Calgary-Buffer, on the weekend took the opportunity to review for us through the media the history of regulations in this Assembly. It's a rather interesting history.

Each session this time of year – and this session may be different – we pass about 30 to 40 bills, and each of those bills comes to the

Assembly and is debated in public. We hear from stakeholders, and we often have people in the galleries who come to listen to debate on the bills. If you miss the debate, you can pick it up in *Hansard*. During that same period when those 30 or 40 bills are being debated, between 400 and 600 regulations will become law, and they're quite different.

The regulations are done in private. They aren't open to public scrutiny. They're the work of the departments. The departments often claim that they consult – and I'm sure they do in most cases – the stakeholders that would be interested in the regulations that they are putting together. Nevertheless, it's all done in private, and there's no record of the conversations that are held with stakeholders. There's no record of the kinds of arguments that were used to support the regulations or the rationale for particular regulations. It's really the department officials, unelected officials, who decide on who will be consulted and come at it from the perspective of an administration of the law rather than the kind of perspective that we have in this House, and that is one of looking at the law in terms of a policy perspective.

There have been instances in the past where those regulations that were put together by department officials were very costly to Alberta taxpayers. It was a result of the regulations that were put together concerning access to information and the application fees that we have the highest application fees in Canada. As I listened to the debate on that legislation, it certainly wasn't the intent of legislators that access to information would somehow or other be constrained through very high application fees. It makes it difficult for people to gain access to laws and rules surrounding private hospitals or to school records or to a whole host of things, and that is the direct result of regulation-making being done in private and not being open to public scrutiny before it was put in place.

Even the Auditor General has indicated that those regulations that were put in place concerning oil field waste resulted in taxpayers paying an extra \$100 million. So, again, an example of regulations being done in private, without public scrutiny, and the taxpayers are the ones that suffer. Regulations are very important in our province, and the fact that this bill would have more than half of it devoted to the making of regulations or delegated to regulation-makers I think has to be disturbing.

One of the things that the former Member for Calgary-Buffer did on the weekend was to remind us of the history of regulation-making in our province. It was the Zander committee under the Lougheed government that examined regulations and regulation-making in the province. They had looked at various provincial governments across Canada and at how the power to make regulations was being used elsewhere and came back to the Assembly with a number of suggestions.

One of the key recommendations from the Zander committee was to create an all-party scrutiny committee of MLAs which would take and would review the regulations that the departments, the executive branch, put forward. The intent was that that committee would be the watchdog on regulations that were being made and would ensure that the departments weren't acting in an arbitrary manner and that the regulations that were formulated were consistent with the legislation that was in place. So the oversight by the legislation was seen at that time to be a very important aspect of regulation-making.

Each session, the former Member for Calgary-Buffer points out, we appoint members of this Assembly – and we've just recently done it – to sit on the Law and Regulations Committee. I've been named to that committee myself, and the unfortunate thing is that the committee never meets. Since I've been in the House, the committee has not met. It has become a ritual, the appointment of that committee, a meaningless ritual and a ritual that I think none of us

should be proud to be part of. I think we should ask ourselves, when we're asked to sit on that committee, exactly what we're doing by being part of an exercise that pretends to appoint a watchdog committee, but the watchdog never goes to work.

5:00

The previous Member for Calgary-Buffalo went on to indicate that since 1985 there have been generated 15,000 – 15,000 – pages of regulations and that in fact since 1993 the government has passed more than 2,000 new regulations and added another 3,000 pages to the already abundant list of regulations there. I think the bright spot in all of this is that in 1995 there was a law passed to fix a sunset date for new regulations. You know, the notion of an expiry date for regulations, I think the member pointed out, is a good one, but it still doesn't take away the need for an all-party committee to overlook the regulations that are being generated.

I think if you look at the regulations that Bill 1 would have generated, those regulations are exactly the concerns of constituents. They are exactly the kinds of information that Albertans would like to have information on. They're the kinds of concerns that they would certainly be interested in seeing debated in this Legislature. If you look at the list starting in section 7(1),

the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations

- (a) defining for the purposes of this Act and the regulations any terms or expressions not already defined.

So really it can change the purpose of the act. It can broaden or narrow the act.

The regulations have a huge impact on the administration of the protection that is supposed to be afforded citizens under this act. They can make regulations "respecting the determination of the Alberta price and the amount to be prescribed by regulation," so they have control over the price, which is a huge, huge factor in this legislation. In 7(1)(c) they can make regulations "authorizing rebates." So the very kinds of things that most homeowners and rent payers would like to know – when are the rebates going to be paid, and what is the basis for the rebates? – that kind of information will be determined by administrators behind closed doors and away from public scrutiny. That, Mr. Chairman, I think is really unfortunate.

They can go on even further, and they can determine "the circumstances in which a person is considered not to be an eligible consumer" and not eligible for rebates. People would like to know what those ground rules are. In the last round of rebates there was, as I'm sure you're aware, Mr. Chairman, great public discussion about the awarding of the \$150 to every Albertan over 16 years of age and great public questioning as to the wisdom of using that criterion to spend tax money on a rebate program. So the eligibility of consumers is of great concern. They can make regulations regarding the application procedures, how difficult or how easy it is to apply for and obtain the rebates. Again, there'll be nothing said publicly until the regulations are generated and in fact have become part of the law, no public discussion of the conditions under which the rebates may be made, so no one will know what will trigger rebates. What is the threshold when citizens can expect that there will be a rebate available to them? Again, I think that is unfortunate.

The ground rules, the playing rules, are not going to be public until some administrator, some department officials have sat down in the privacy of their offices and decided when those rebates shall start to operate and the manner in which and the frequency with which the rebates will be made, and that's of huge importance to citizens and consumers. Is it going to be a credit on your bill, or is it going to be a cheque that you receive in the mail? I think the kinds of phone calls that our constituency offices are receiving about when the second \$150 rebate will actually be made available give

you some indication of the interest that there is in the manner in which rebates and their frequency are made available. Again, it's unfortunate that the members of this Legislature, who have been elected to act on behalf of Albertans, will not be part of that discussion.

The maximum amount of rebate that may be paid to an eligible consumer for marketable gas consumed in the province for industrial purposes is again going to be subject to regulation. I have some suspicion that some large consumers have the ability to influence decisions in ways that many small consumers don't, but they will still be subjected to the same secrecy regarding what is going to happen to them in terms of rebates as smaller consumers are.

I guess the last one that I would indicate is the administration of the rebates paid to vendors for the benefit of eligible consumers. The vendors are going to find out what the rules are in terms of them offering rebates to consumers once the regulations are made.

So it's a long, long list, Mr. Chairman, of regulations that are going to be made that affect Albertans, and it's an important program. For government to embark on a rebate program is very, very important to taxpayers because that money that goes into that program is not available for other programs. All of the really important decisions, it seems, concerning those rebates will be made behind closed doors, as I've indicated a number of times, by department officials and by administrators whose interests may vary somewhat from the interests of the consumers in this province and the interests of legislators.

In concluding, Mr. Chairman, I would make a plea to the new members appointed to the Law and Regulations Committee, under the chairmanship of the Member for Peace River, for that committee to take up its work. To the new members – the Member for Calgary-Egmont, the Member for Calgary-Shaw, the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, the Member for Calgary-Buffalo, the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, the Member for Edmonton-Manning, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, the Member for Edmonton-Calder – and other members on that committee, I would plead with them to make the Law and Regulations Committee a committee which does the work that it was originally intended to do and that would be very, very useful at this particular point in time in overseeing some important regulations, the ones that are going to be generated from Bill 1 should Bill 1 pass in this Assembly.

So it's with those comments, Mr. Chairman, I'd conclude. Thank you very much.

5:10

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Before I recognize the next speaker, who is Edmonton-Highlands, I'd just like to remind members once again to please tone down the noise level. The chair is experiencing difficulty hearing the speakers.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

MR. MASON: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, traditionally after an election a government introduces as Bill 1 its most important piece of legislation, whether or not that's real or just symbolic. You know, when the Parti Quebecois government was first elected in Quebec, of course they introduced their Bill 1, which was their language law, which obviously was the most important thing to them at the time.

This also reflects the ideology of the government. It's of number one importance, and that is natural gas rebates. And why not, because it was in fact through natural gas rebates that the present government got where it is today. It was a number one issue in the provincial election and a number one election strategy for the Tory government in securing a renewal of its mandate. So I find it suitable that this particular bill would be the first order of business

of the government after the election. The act, of course, allows the government to make use of the financial resources of this province to provide rebates to citizens of Alberta with very, very little restriction, if any.

We've advocated all along – in fact, we advocated a year ago, back at the time of the by-election in Edmonton-Highlands – that something had to be done about natural gas prices. I think we were the first to raise that as an issue, and we certainly found that the public was very responsive to the thought that the government needs to do something about rising natural gas prices. Indeed, Mr. Chairman, natural gas prices in Alberta in the last few years have gone through the roof, and that is largely due to the fact that the governments, both the provincial government and the federal government, have encouraged the export of massive quantities of natural gas to the United States, creating essentially a North American market for this commodity. That leaves Alberta consumers at the vagaries of the Chicago price for their own natural gas.

We've always advocated, at least for home heating purposes, that the price of natural gas ought to be capped at \$3 a gigajoule, and we propose that it be done not through rebates but by actually fixing the real problem, which is the high price of natural gas. By a small increase in the royalties paid by producers, it would be very easy for the government to actually permanently reduce the price in Alberta to a level that was consistent with what it was a couple of years ago.

We continue to believe, Mr. Chairman, that that's the best course of action, but the government doesn't see it that way. The government is going to go in a different direction, and that is to provide rebates and let consumers recycle those rebates through their bank accounts and into the pockets of the gas company and of the natural gas producers. We believe our approach is superior, because for every \$1 in increased royalties due to natural gas prices that the government receives, energy producers receive on average about \$3. So they're very easily able to fund modest price protection for consumers out of the windfall profits that they're receiving as a result of the government creating this North American energy market.

Now, if we come to the specifics of Bill 1, the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, to support this as it's presently drafted would be in our view reckless. It would undermine the Legislative Assembly and the duties of each member. The specific provisions of Bill 1 as set out in sections 1 and 2 give way too much discretion to the provincial cabinet in making its regulations. These sections of Bill 1 are nothing more than an empty shell. They do nothing more than delegate from the Legislative Assembly to the provincial cabinet who is eligible to receive rebates, the amount of the rebates they receive, and when they receive these rebates. I sincerely hope that the government will introduce amendments at committee stage to rectify this unacceptable situation.

Unless this bill is fixed, I can't see how the New Democrat opposition will be able to support it. What the government is asking the Legislative Assembly to do is to give a blank cheque to the provincial cabinet. What Bill 1 does is give the power to the provincial cabinet to decide based on political considerations when, how much, and to whom natural gas rebates will be provided. Bill 1, therefore, fails the test of good governance. A feature of good governance, Mr. Chairman, is that the Legislative Assembly should not pass a law which transfers the power of making laws into other hands. The specific provisions of Bill 1 failed to limit the discretionary power of the provincial cabinet.

I'd like to review the specific provisions of Bill 1 and how they fail the test of good governance. Section 1(b)(ii) of Bill 1 allows the Lieutenant Governor in Council discretion to decide both who is and who is not an eligible consumer. If rebates are to be given from the

public chest, the Legislative Assembly should be the one who decides who is and who is not eligible. For example, is it the cabinet's intent to only make residential consumers eligible? Will rebates also be provided to farmers, to small business people, to school boards, and health authorities or even to larger industrial consumers? Or will the eligible consumers depend on how close we get to the next election or who exerts the most political pressure? Who knows, Mr. Chairman? You sure won't find any answers in Bill 1.

Section 2 deals with when a rebate might be provided. This section reads:

Where, in the opinion of the Minister of Energy, the Alberta price is or is likely to be greater than the amount prescribed in the regulations, the Lieutenant Governor in Council may authorize a rebate.

Provisions like this are not delegation but abdication. Here again we read a provision that allows the provincial cabinet wide discretion on matters that should properly be put within Bill 1 itself. There is no formula set out whereby there is any indication of what the rebate levels will be or at what price level they will kick in.

Additionally, the bill is named the Natural Gas Price Protection Act, but a careful reading of section 1(d) and section 4(1) indicates that an elevated price of other substances might entitle one to a rebate. However, "other substances" is not clearly defined. Section 1(d) states: "Other substances" [include] propane, heating oil and any other substance used for heating purposes." Again, Mr. Chairman, "heating purposes" is not defined within the bill. Does this mean home heating, heating of schools and hospitals, heating of greenhouses, heating for the purposes of generating electricity, or some other industrial purpose? Again, who knows?

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, Bill 1 is riddled with gaps and holes, and it would be irresponsible to leave solely to the provincial cabinet the discretion to fill these gaps and plug the holes. Instead of providing some certainty to Albertans about what kind of protection they can expect to receive from high natural gas prices, this is strictly a political bill which gives the provincial cabinet a blank cheque to decide to whom, how much, and when politically motivated rebate cheques can be sent out.

5:20

Mr. Chairman, as it stands, the New Democrat opposition cannot support the bill. This has the same deficiencies as I referred to in my comments on Bill 7. It is an abdication of the responsibility of this Legislative Assembly, the transfer of its powers on a wholesale basis to the government, where decisions, as I said earlier, are not made here in open, public debate but are made in private, behind closed doors around the cabinet table.

Something like rebates, which are such an incredibly powerful political tool for any government caring to use them, cannot be provided in a bill as flimsy as this one. It galls me that billions and billions of dollars that have been handed out in rebates as we led up to the last provincial election are now being enshrined in this legislation with far less legislative framework than things like the regulation of taxis or the regulation of co-operatives. We saw the massive bill on co-operatives by the hon. member opposite. It's this thick. It weighs half a pound, but here we've got a bill that will allow the government to hand out billions of dollars with no strings, with no scrutiny by the Legislature, yet this government has the arrogance to ask us to pass it.

Well, I don't think so, Mr. Chairman. I think this is a bad bill. There's something wrong here. This bill, the first priority of the government, is the first priority of the Legislature to defeat if we have any sense, if we have any commitment to the rules of parliamentary government that allows the elected people of this province

or of this country to have a say as to how their expenditures are made. That is the first principle of our parliamentary system, and the government's bill completely flies in the face of that principle, of a thousand years of struggle for democratic representation in the British system. We need to do something about this bill. I'm appalled that the government could bring forward a bill with absolutely no scrutiny on billions of dollars of politically motivated expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, those are my comments at this stage of the bill. Hopefully we'll have much more debate. I hope that the government will actually bring forward some amendments when we continue to deal with this bill in committee stage. It can't stand the way it is now. It's got loopholes here that you could drive a Brink's truck through. I hope that something is done.

Mr. Chairman, that will conclude my remarks, and I will now move that we adjourn debate on this issue.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The Government House Leader.

MR. HANCOCK: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on Bill 1.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

[The Assembly adjourned at 5:25 p.m.]

