

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 5, 2002**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 02/03/05

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: Prayers

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our Father, we confidently ask for Your strength and encouragement in our service of You through our service of others. We ask for Your gift of wisdom to guide us in making good laws and good decisions for the present and the future of Alberta. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: Introduction of Guests

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHTYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a group of about 49 grade 6 students and nine adults from Graminia school. The teachers are Mrs. Janice Carsell-Michaud and Mrs. Colleen McGhan-Cox, and they are accompanied by teaching assistants Mrs. Heather Friskie and Mrs. Debbie Fagan along with parent helpers Mrs. Tina Sautner, Mrs. Alanna Taylor, Mrs. Sheryl Hennig, Mrs. Yvette Schuh, and Mrs. Leslea Martin. I also have the privilege on Thursday of attending their DARE graduation. DARE is the drug abuse resistance education program, one of the best programs that has ever come into schools, sponsored by the RCMP and city police. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise today, I'd like to thank our hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung, who has given me the privilege of introducing two guests this afternoon that live in his constituency but will be properly recognized later by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark. The guests are Sid Hanson and his lovely wife, Emily. Sid has been the chairman of the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority. Many of us were privileged to honour and recognize Sid last week as we said good-bye to him in his role as chairman. He's been an outstanding leader. He has made aviation history in this province with the things he has done. I would ask Emily and Sid to please rise so we can warmly acknowledge their presence in the House this afternoon.

head: Oral Question Period

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

Children's Services

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On February 22 Children's Services placed a troubled 15 year old in a Grande Prairie motel with no adult supervision. According to an article in the Grande Prairie *Daily Herald-Tribune*, a 13-year-old girl was among the 10 youths found by the RCMP partying in that room that night. In today's *Edmonton Journal* the minister is quoted as saying that this practice is "rare, discouraged," yet the motel owner told the Official Opposition that he is asked twice a month to take overnight guests from children's authorities. My question today is to the Minister of Children's Services. Does the minister consider twice a month in one hotel a rare occurrence?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, at your pleasure I will table some documents that I will read from in part today that respond to the hon. member.

We do not believe that it's advisable to provide residence for children in a motel. We at all times look for placement within either residential homes of foster families or in group homes. This situation was most unfortunate in that the child in question that had been resident in the motel had had an obvious – what shall we say? – error in the management of the paperwork that surrounded the child's transfer, and there was a lack of knowledge by the worker that was supposed to be attending and supervising the child. I do not believe that any of these circumstances are ones that we would condone. While they are regrettable, I am assured today that they are doing everything in their power to make sure that this does not happen again. It is an embarrassment, obviously, but one that we're working to ensure doesn't occur again.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the minister think it is acceptable that while this incident happened well over a week ago, she still did not have the information for this House yesterday?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I did not have the information for the House yesterday, and for that I apologize. We have been working very hard to provide the follow-up on the basis of the comments that the hon. member has made. We have done a review of the situation, and we have spoken to the people that are in charge of that authority. I am truly sorry that this incident occurred. I am only thankful that nothing that seems to have been materially wrong has happened to harm either the safety or well-being of the children, but it is something that wherever possible we work to our utmost to avoid.

Mr. Speaker, may I just to this Assembly say one thing. I had three sons, and God knows that as a good parent I tried to do my level best. From time to time they did things that I did not approve of, and I followed up on that. To try and attack this minister for the things that we do that are right for over 15,000 children every day is wrong. We've got ministers, people that are working out there doing as much as they can to be prudent parents. [interjection] If the hon. member would only listen, she might find out that in 99 percent of the cases we are a hundred percent right.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister tell this House what her department has done in the past week to make sure that the parents' home is the best place for the child, when only a few days ago Children's Services saw fit to remove this child from his home?

MS EVANS: You know, Mr. Speaker, with great regret I did not hear all of the hon. member's questions, but I assume they related to the due diligence of what had been put in place in the department within that authority this past week. I will table the answers to the three questions: why there wasn't a safe, supervised facility for this child, asked yesterday; relative to the motel owners and relative to the confirmation about how we place children in motels, today.

On the latter point that has been raised by the hon. member, the Leader of the Opposition, I will table further work that has been done in the authority on behalf of the children.

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

Special Case Review

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Children's Services has promised to release a report this week on the special case review that looked into the tragic deaths of Angel and Shaniece Kerrigan-Kinahan, the Slave Lake twins found dead in a Thunder Bay motel room on January 27. I am very concerned that the Minister of Children's Services may have biased . . .

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Just a second. Let's hear what we have to say here first.

DR. NICOL: I'm very concerned that the Minister of Children's Services may have biased the outcome of this commission before it even started, because on February 4 she told CBC radio that after the private guardianship order was in place, the responsibility was not hers but was instead the twins' grandfather's, Mr. Kerrigan. To the Minister of Children's Services: did the special case review consider whether or not recent cuts to the Children's Services budget played a role in the events leading to the deaths of those children?

THE SPEAKER: Now, hon. minister, on a point of order.

Point of Order Referring to Persons by Name

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that one does not raise in this House the names of children, and I would question whether or not the hon. member, in raising the question in the fashion he has done – has he made in fact a breach of what we understand is our parliamentary procedure? There's confidentiality in dealing with children.

THE SPEAKER: On this point of order are there additional points?

MS CARLSON: Sir, will we deal with this point of order after question period, which has been the traditional time to deal with points of order?

1:40

THE SPEAKER: Are there additional comments on this point of order?

Well, hon. members, the traditional time in which one would deal with a point of order would be at the conclusion of question period. However, in terms of the efficiency of this particular parliament on this particular day, the point of order raised by the hon. Minister of Children's Services is an interesting one. The hon. minister says that it would not be appropriate to raise the names of certain children in this Assembly. Yet it would appear to the chair that the names of these children have been common public knowledge for several weeks now, and it has been commented on by a number of individuals, including the hon. minister herself, and these names have been publicly reported throughout the media in this country.

So I think that it's probably prudent to deal with this point of order now and indicate that it's not a point of order and ask the hon. leader to proceed.

Special Case Review (continued)

DR. NICOL: Mr. Speaker, will the minister respond to the first question?

THE SPEAKER: Another interesting fine point, hon. leader. With

strike one one could almost argue that the hon. minister has responded to the first question.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister explain how she is not biasing the outcome of the special case review when she has already stated that her department is not to blame?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure in which context the hon. member is using the words. We have been very careful in the statements issued about special case reviews in every circumstance not to bias those reviews. We have been very careful in the most recent circumstances where we appointed a special panel to make sure that somebody was appointed from outside the province, to make sure that we provided somebody with huge credentials, a doctor renowned in his various areas of expertise. We've done our utmost to make sure that we provide an unbiased opportunity for the panel to look at the issues.

Mr. Speaker, I have not been familiar with any context in which we have tried to shift emphasis, lay blame, or change the context. The only article that has appeared before me has been something as stated by the member that is responsible for the College of Social Workers in Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: will the minister promise this House that the results of the special case review will be made public?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've stated it again and again and again. We will be as transparent as we can without breaking any confidentiality. The report will have two parts. It will respond on what our findings are and recommendations from the special case review, and it will also deal with and address those issues which were identified as human resource issues.

Thank you.

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

Children's Services (continued)

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "It is our belief that supports and services for children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families are in jeopardy and that individuals are being put at risk." Those are the words of the Southern Alberta Community Living Association. Yet the Minister of Children's Services maintains that children are not being hurt. My questions are to that minister. Does denying youngsters previously approved for funding and services not hurt children?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, until today I thought the hon. opposition had forgotten me, but they haven't, so I'm glad to be back.

Mr. Speaker, that's a very serious question. I have been privileged to receive a number of concerns on behalf of the parents and on behalf of the children from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-West, who has reviewed with me not only a videotape of the actual meeting but has given me names and addresses of people who have asked questions. Obviously there are individual answers to individual cases, but we have been doing our utmost to make sure that children who have disabilities have the privilege of having supports.

Later today I will speak in this House on legislation that will address the ways that children receive supports. We think it's important for policy to provide a framework for their opportunity to receive dollars, that it shouldn't be at the whim of somebody making decisions or an appeal panel to judge whether it was right or wrong. We've done our utmost, Mr. Speaker, to find ways and means to support those children with special needs. I should add that across Canada one of the reasons why children take a look at Alberta with special advantage and why people move here is because there are more supports provided here for children with special disabilities than there are anywhere else from sea to sea.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: It's interesting, but that's not what I asked, Mr. Speaker.

Does denying youngsters previously approved for service not hurt children?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, since last fall when we first worked on cost-containment strategies, I have asked for people to bring to me names and circumstances where children have not received service that they must receive in order to look after the best interests of the child. If there are specific examples, the hon. opposition and other members have not thought fit to bring those forward to me.

More recently I met with a number of social workers from across Alberta. I asked for the same thing: please give me names and addresses so that if children have been denied service that they absolutely need, then we would look into it but in the confidential manner in which we handle every case file, hon. member, and not just bringing it out to air here in the Legislative Assembly as if we have suddenly found something that's wrong in the system.

We have been doing everything possible, and if I go back to the resources that we've spent this past year, let's reiterate: \$647 million spent on children's services this year, huge increases from three years ago – \$647 million, Mr. Speaker – and the only one of three ministers that will see additions still provided for children as identified in the throne speech, something that further underscores the commitment of this government to the children of Alberta.

DR. MASSEY: Well, I'll try again, Mr. Speaker. Does denying youngsters previously approved for service not hurt those children?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, without saying specifics, how can I respond to that?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Back-to-work Order

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in this Assembly the Minister of Justice said that even if another mechanism is found for settling the province's dispute with teachers, he's still leaning towards appealing last Friday's court ruling which threw out the government's back-to-work order. The Minister of Justice seems to be taking lessons from a former colleague on how to waste public dollars on suicidal missions in the courts. My question to the Premier: why won't the Premier rein in the Justice minister before he needlessly wastes more public dollars on a pointless appeal of a court ruling on the back-to-work order?

MR. KLEIN: Well, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the hon.

leader of the third party is full of anticipation and speculation. Nothing has been decided. My recollection of the question that was asked of the Justice minister and Attorney General was: was an appeal being considered? His reply was that if – and that is an if, if underlined – an appeal is to be launched, it wouldn't be launched on the case itself, in other words the issue of the dispute, but it would be launched on a jurisdictional basis. But there has been no decision whatsoever as to whether an appeal will be launched.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the Premier: does the Premier stand behind his Justice minister, who said in this House yesterday that Justice Allan Wachowich of the Court of Queen's Bench interfered – these are the words that the minister used – with a provincial cabinet order in ruling on the government's back-to-work order?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Justice minister and Attorney General is a wonderful lawyer and, I understand, a very competent lawyer and as a lawyer is entitled to express an opinion relative to any decision, as is any other citizen free to express an opinion. How I feel about that opinion makes no difference at all. As a matter of fact, I have no thoughts whatsoever on that particular opinion. This is a matter of law and a matter on which lawyers could and should rightfully comment.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier is not willing to take a position, let me ask the minister himself. Will the Justice minister withdraw his offensive use of the word "interference," which resulted in the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench taking the very unusual step of defending his actions in an on-air radio interview? Would you like to comment on it?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, you can use whatever synonym you wish for the word, but the comment essentially that I was trying to make yesterday was that when a court reviews an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council which is expressed in legislation to be the opinion of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, there's a very high standard. In the judgment itself there's a distinction made between the Lieutenant Governor in Council operating as an administrative body or operating as a legislative body. Obviously, the court and I have a difference of opinion as to whether we were legislating or administrating.

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

Teachers' Labour Dispute

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday Premier Klein and then the ministers of Learning and Human Resources and Employment met with the head of the Alberta Teachers' Association. As a result of these meetings, caucus will be reviewing a plan that may lead to a possible resolution of the current labour dispute. My first question today relates to one part of the proposed solution: a Mazankowski-style educational review. To the Minister of Learning: can you confirm that a report of this nature is being considered and outline what sorts of things would be included in such a review?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, this was something that was raised in the conversations that were being had yesterday. I must also say that this has been raised in the context of the Future Summit. We will take a look at all of these suggestions, and I do believe there is some merit in this. I believe there's merit in continually evaluating our system, in continually attempting to come up with a better system, and I'm certainly one hundred percent behind anything that will do that. The specific details I cannot give the hon. member here today, but I will confirm that we are taking a look at it.

Speaker's Ruling Oral Question Period Practices

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, normally caucus matters are not the purview of the question period. Now, this is rather interesting, where a government member has raised a question to a government minister and they've agreed publicly to discuss caucus matters.

Proceed.

Teachers' Labour Dispute (continued)

MRS. ADY: My second question, hopefully as good as my first, is to the same minister. If binding arbitration is part of the solution, how does what is being proposed differ from what government outlined in the original back-to-work order?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I will say that I'm a little cautious in talking about this purely because it is speculation and again given the hon. Speaker's previous ruling. We were asked by the leader of the ATA to take a look at binding arbitration. Our first look at it shows it to be very similar to what was brought forward to the emergency tribunal, so we are looking at the specific details of that. I do believe though, again, that it is a little too early to comment fully on it, and in the due course of time perhaps – perhaps – this Legislature will have a look at it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. ADY: Thank you. My final question is to the Minister of Learning. What role will school boards play in this? Don't they have a say?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, that's an excellent, excellent question, because over the last four or five months the school boards in many cases have been the forgotten party in all of this. The school boards are the ones who will be signing the contract. So, yes, they do have a say, and I will announce today, as the Premier has announced, that the Premier and I will be meeting with the head of the Alberta School Boards Association tomorrow to discuss what has taken place. I do not want to prejudice any of the discussions, but I expect that it will be a very frank, a very blunt, and a very good discussion.

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

Low-income Programs

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the visit to the

Herb Jamieson Centre last December one would think that the Premier and this government would have a greater appreciation and a sense of urgency for the plight of the homeless, the poor, and the disabled of this province. My first question is for the Premier. Why is this government trying to balance the budget on the backs of the poor and the disabled using the \$34 million originally budgeted for low-income programs that has not been used?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, to my knowledge we're not, and we have no intention to do so. It's the policy of this government to look after those who truly can't fend for themselves in society, and I think we're doing a darn good job of doing just that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that in the third-quarter fiscal update that we all received last week Human Resources and Employment spending is \$34 million lower than budgeted due to lower costs for supports for independence, labour market development, and skill development programs, why can't you do the right thing and increase SFI rates and the rates for the AISH clients now? Why make them wait until some low-income review from the minister . . .

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, before I have the hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment respond, I would like to point out to the hon. member that the AISH program is unique in Canada.

MRS. NELSON: The only one of its kind.

MR. KLEIN: Yes, it's the only one of its kind in Canada, and we are so fortunate in this province to be able to have a program that looks after an assured income for the severely handicapped. To my knowledge no other province, no other jurisdiction in this country has such a program, so that's something to keep in mind when he criticizes a program that is unique in this country. Relative to the specifics of the question, I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, let's examine the facts, Mr. Speaker, if we could. First of all, I think that because of the leadership and the philosophy of this particular government, we have the Alberta advantage well at work within this province, and what we're starting to see, of course, and what the hon. member has inadvertently allowed me the opportunity to do is to tell you and to tell all Albertans that the number of clients dependent on our supports for independence programs is down. These people are in fact working, and isn't that what we want?

We receive money from the federal government under the labour market development agreement, which, I might add, is an excellent example of flexible federalism. It works very, very well, but again because of the high employment levels within Alberta there were fewer clients coming forward that needed the assistance of the LMDAs, and because under our agreement we can't transfer those moneys into other particular areas, then of course it is something that we don't fill up the full component of that contract with the federal government. The SDP program that he's referred to is the acronym for the skills development program, and once again we have Albertans out in the workplace working and gaining training, gaining experience, making money, paying taxes, all of those things within this Alberta economy.

Now, here's where, of course, the key is, and I think that even the hon. member in his household would have a basic understanding, a basic understanding of the fact that because of the decrease in these

numbers you do create a little bit of a surplus, I think about .03 percent of our particular budget. You don't start funding operating, ongoing programs with surpluses.

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment then: when can the disabled, those Albertans who cannot work, expect an increase in their benefit rate under the AISH program?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, under the AISH program, as a matter of fact, we've just made some recent – actually, it was under supports for independence. Pardon me. The AISH program, if that's now what he is discussing, is part of the low-income review that we're currently looking at. We have received a report from the low-income review committee not only in terms of what they heard when they went around and listened to all Albertans that had an interest in this particular area, but they also made recommendations based on the input that was received. As a department we are currently examining this, and in the due course of time we of course will be going through the internal process and then presenting something to this House in terms of our response.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

School Bus Driver Qualifications

MRS. FRITZ: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Last Friday a very serious incident occurred. It's been alleged that a school bus driver who tested at nearly three times the blood alcohol limit while driving created some very serious problems. There were 40 ECS to grade 9 students on the bus that day. Luckily, due to the intervention of a few very brave students the serious potential for disaster was averted. So today my questions are for the Minister of Transportation. Mr. Minister, what are the qualifications that are required by your department for a person to drive a school bus?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, any person wishing to drive a school bus in excess of a seating capacity of 24 would have to have either a class 1 or a class 2 driver's licence. If that particular bus has air brakes, they would also need their air brake endorsement. The school board and/or bus contractors would also require further screening of the drivers by looking at their abstracts. They cannot obtain this without the written consent of the applicant, and section 66 of the Motor Vehicle Administration Act allows insurance companies, police, and also school board contractors to further investigate and check the abstract but, again, on written consent of the applicant.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. The fact is that a driver's abstract is simply a snapshot, I understand, of the previous three years of their record, so it may not show a previous suspension or conviction. How can a bus company obtain the full history of a prospective driver?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, I'll just make it very clear that nothing is ever removed from a driver's abstract. That record will remain with the driver for life. It's just that it's a three-year

snapshot, and it is possible to further check into the person's driving record by asking of course and, again, receiving written consent to see if there's any criminal record, as well, with respect to that particular applicant. So there are provisions. In this particular case it's the three-year picture, snapshot, and in those three years of course part of the record wasn't included.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MRS. FRITZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Given the situation, I'd ask the minister: will he commit to reviewing the school boards' and bus companies' systems for screening applicants?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, we will commit to again sit down with school boards and school bus contractors to look at how we can look at the process. But I just want to remind the House that on a daily basis there are about 200,000 students on about 5,500 school buses. I don't want to diminish this particular issue that happened, but if you look at the kilometres, on a daily basis that's like going around the world 10 times in one day. We have to be more vigilant, more diligent, and I assure the House that we will continue to monitor and work with school boards to ensure that this does not happen again, but overall we have a pretty decent school bus driving record in the province of Alberta.

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

Bighorn Wildlife Recreation Area

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are all to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What tracking or enforcement does your department do to enforce its policy that off-highway vehicles are not permitted in areas designated zone 1, prime protection?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, the area that's been mentioned in this House a number of times is the Bighorn backcountry, and I indicated earlier that that area covers – it's a very sensitive area – over 4,000 square kilometres.

AN HON. MEMBER: How big?

MR. CARDINAL: Over 4,000 square kilometres, and 80 percent of it is prime protection area. In fact, during the special places process which took place the last number of years, it was nominated as a site to be designated as a special places site. The appropriate committee, which is normally selected by the municipalities in the area, reviewed it and decided at the time that the area should be left as it was with additional work in relation to how access would be dealt with in that particular area. Of course, since then we've set up a committee of 15 members representing various organizations like the petroleum industry, trail riding, guides and outfitters, off-highway vehicle users, which the opposition member mentioned, snowmobilers, and also residents of Clearwater county.

Mr. Speaker, what will happen is that there is going to be a public meeting on March 14, I believe, at Rocky Mountain House, and of course at this public meeting we will hear from the general public to determine what processes should take place in order to arrive at a multi-use area keeping in mind that, yes, we have to protect the environment, but we also have to allow the development that's required that it is possible to do in the area.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am confident that with the participation of those members that are living out there and the users, we will come up with a decent plan. That area is over 4,000 square kilometres, and the public, both people that want to protect the environment and people that want to use parts of the area for other uses – it is possible to do that. We have no problem doing that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He didn't answer the question, so I'll ask this one. What actual steps has his department taken to ensure that off-highway vehicles are not being used in this area of the Bighorn? We would actually like an answer to this question.

MR. CARDINAL: You know, maybe the opposition would do it a little differently than we did. No doubt they would. No doubt they'd put the rules in first and then put the committee in after to determine how you may deal with the rules. We don't operate that way. We don't operate that way, Mr. Speaker. We look at the whole area of 4,000 square kilometres. Eighty percent is prime protected area, but there is an opportunity for multi-use in the area, and this is exactly what's happening with the 15-member committee. The 4,000 square kilometres will be reviewed thoroughly.

Just remember – I want to mention it again – that it was recommended to be designated for special places. That was not accepted by the committee from that region. They said that that area should be multi-use, and that is exactly what we're doing.

MS CARLSON: So, Mr. Speaker, with two nonanswers is this minister actually saying that they are doing no tracking or enforcement or taking any steps to ensure that off-road vehicles are not used in the Bighorn?

MR. CARDINAL: Mr. Speaker, that is, you know, the concern out there. Some of the public are concerned that there are too many off-road vehicles in any area of Alberta. Then, of course, you'll have the others that want to protect the area completely. You can be assured that we will always keep a balance, keep the environmental side protected and also the development side that can be developed in a reasonable way developed.

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

2:10

Romanow Commission

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recent media comments it appears that the Romanow commission is hearing similar concerns as were brought forward to the Mazankowski group. My question is to the Minister of Health and Wellness. What is the cost of the Romanow exercise versus Mazankowski's?

Speaker's Ruling

Questions outside Ministerial Responsibility

THE SPEAKER: The first commission that the hon. member is referring to falls under federal jurisdiction. It is not within the purview of a member of Executive Council in the province of Alberta. However, if the minister feels that he is certainly capable of answering the question, he can proceed.

Romanow Commission

(continued)

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, there have been a number of commissions

that have been created across Canada to review the issue of the Canadian health care system. Of course, there's been the Claire commission in the province of Quebec, the Fyke commission in the province of Saskatchewan, the Kirby Senate commission and the Romanow commission, and of course our own Premier's council on health care, led by former Deputy Prime Minister Mazankowski.

Mr. Speaker, I can indicate that there have been many similar findings in these reports across Canada, whether it's coming from economists or from health care professionals or patients themselves, and whether it comes from an NDP government or a Parti Quebecois government or a Liberal government, many of the same conclusions have been arrived at.

I can indicate, Mr. Speaker, that I have investigated this particular question. The cost of the Fyke commission, which was for the province of Ontario and commissioned by then Premier Romanow and delivered to now Premier Calvert of the province of Saskatchewan – that report was estimated at being \$2 million. The Romanow commission has a budget which has been disclosed to the public as being in the range of \$15 million. By comparison, the numbers which I tabled, I believe, in this House yesterday, the cost of the Mazankowski report, came in at \$326,000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: how will the Romanow report tie in with the Maz report?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, we have said all along that from the perspective of the provincial government of Alberta there are good ideas that are meritorious of investigation that have emerged from other jurisdictions in Canada. I believe that Mr. Romanow will do a very good job in his public hearings. Any recommendations that come out of Mr. Romanow's commission that may be applicable to the province of Alberta and would be of benefit to the delivery of health care in this province we will be prepared to evaluate and move forward on if those good ideas. . .

AN HON. MEMBER: Make sense.

MR. MAR: Make sense. Exactly.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will look at what Mr. Romanow prepares when his report is delivered later on this year. I believe that November is the timetable he has set out. In the meantime we are proceeding with the 44 recommendations set out in the Mazankowski report.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BRODA: No further questions here.

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

Grant Funding Policy

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The federal cultural spaces Canada program offered \$80 million to improve infrastructure for artistic communities. Alberta's arts and cultural groups have not had access to funds like these since 1967, and now they can't get reliable matching funding because this government is dithering about lottery fund allocations. My questions are all to the Minister of Gaming. Why is the minister jeopardizing access to federal money by his on-again, off-again grant funding policy?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the hon. member knows, each year in this House lottery fund estimates are tabled and debated, and each year, in the last few years, those estimates have had allocations relative to funding for various grant programs including the arts foundation, which, by the way, is under the responsibility of the hon. Minister of Community Development. Once again this year, when the budget comes down, there will be an Alberta lottery estimate, and we will at that point in time address that issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister lunches with some community lottery boards, whereupon their woes disappear, will the minister commit to lunching with all the boards to solve their application woes or at the very least inform them all if there's going to be a program to access?

MR. STEVENS: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't get invited to lunch by all community lottery boards, but if I receive invitations to lunch, I can tell the hon. member that I will give them due consideration, because, as may be apparent, I do like to eat lunch.

AN HON. MEMBER: And dinner and breakfast.

MR. STEVENS: Yeah. Three squares a day is appropriate.

I think the answer to this question, Mr. Speaker, is similar to the answer to the first, and that is that each year the items which make up the Alberta lottery fund estimates are tabled. They will again be tabled along with the budget later this month, and at that point in time the issue that the hon. member has raised will be the subject of debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, be it CFEP grants, lottery board grants, legacy grants, or changes in gaming policy, what is this government's long-term commitment to supporting the voluntary sector?

MR. STEVENS: The commitment of this government with respect to the voluntary sector is significant. The gaming scheme that is in place in Alberta is a charitable one, and the resources associated with that are for the purposes of charity. For example, in the year 2000 as a result of licences being granted to various charities and not-for-profit groups in the province, which would be for casinos and bingos and raffles, they earned something in the order of \$175 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. STEVENS: One hundred and seventy-five million dollars, which went directly to those particular groups.

In addition to that, the funds that went into the Alberta lottery fund, which come from gaming exclusively, were allocated to a number of foundations, two of which are under the responsibility of my ministry, the community facility enhancement grant program and the community lottery board program, and in the past year they had about \$75 million allocated to them. In addition, I believe that there are five foundations which are funded through the Alberta lottery foundation which are under the responsibility of the Minister of Community Development, and I think they amount to another \$50

million or \$60 million. But beyond that, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to recognize that the entire Alberta lottery fund is for the benefit of community and public initiatives, and all Albertans are beneficiaries of that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert.

Municipal Land Reserves for Schools

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Urban Development Institute, which represents commercial developers, joined the city of Edmonton in opposing the Conservative government's push to have a supermarket located on municipal reserve land in the Callingwood area of Edmonton. The Municipal Government Act is clear and unambiguous: municipal reserve land can only be used for parks, recreation areas, and schools; it cannot be used for supermarkets or other private purposes. If municipal reserve land is deemed surplus, the law requires that the land is transferred back to the municipality in which it is located. My question is to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In light of the strong opposition not only of the city of Edmonton but also from the development industry, will the government now back off on its plans to force the school board and the city of Edmonton to locate a high school with a supermarket there?

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member, first and foremost, one thing for certain is that Albertans are not afraid to think outside of the box, because we are in the 21st century. That being said, right now we have a dispute between the city of Edmonton and the Catholic school board. I have offered mediation. In terms of the work within the Catholic school board and the city of Edmonton, though, I hope that they will take up our offer regarding mediation pertaining to this local issue to be dealt with with the local electors.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has been behind this cockamamy scheme from the beginning, isn't his offer of mediation somewhat like asking Ariel Sharon to mediate between the Palestinians and the Israelis?

MR. BOUTILIER: Well, Mr. Speaker, allow me the latitude to respond in this way. The city of Edmonton has sent correspondence to the province indicating this, and I quote: city council is fundamentally opposed to the removal of their authority to make decisions regarding land use. I will table this at the appropriate time. However, what I find interesting is that I read in the *Journal* and the *Sun* that the city of Edmonton says that they'd like to have the province involved. So what is it? Do they want us to allow them to utilize their authority, or do they want us to be involved? How we were involved is through mediation.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, why can't this minister get it through his head that allowing a commercial supermarket to locate on municipal land reserved for schools and parks sets a dangerous and undesirable precedent and that he is in effect asking the city of Edmonton to break the government's own laws?

MR. BOUTILIER: Mr. Speaker, what's very important at the end of the day in these two jurisdictions as they work together is quite

simply this: no matter what takes place, it is the authority of the city of Edmonton. If it's so determined in evaluating the pros and cons to transfer the land from the city of Edmonton to the Catholic school board, that is solely a decision of the city of Edmonton and its local electors.

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

Workers' Compensation Board Review

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has been reviewing the workers' compensation system for some time now, and I've had a number of calls in my constituency office. The review has included a lot of extensive public consultation. Could the Minister of Human Resources and Employment please advise this House what outcomes or status we are looking at for the WCB review process now?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're on the spring list, as you might know, for bringing forward amendments to the Workers' Compensation Act. What we'll be looking at primarily, I think, comes into four areas. First of all, we want to make the workings and the decision-making and the appeal system inside the board more transparent. The second thing that we want to do is to provide an accountability framework whereby, then, all Albertans would be able to analyze and evaluate the operations of the WCB, because there would be an accountability framework which would then be audited by the Auditor General.

We want to remove the apparent conflict between the Appeals Commission and the WCB by moving the Appeals Commission further away from the WCB and having it report to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment and of course, then, have a governance model similar to the Labour Relations Board. Lastly, we want to provide an opportunity for conflicting medical opinion to be dealt with. So a pilot is contemplated between WCB, the Alberta Medical Association, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

Now, all of these changes, of course, will have a price tag to them, and as I understand it, the current estimate for cost is that it will be less than 1 cent per \$100 of payroll, which is the normal assessed level of the WCB.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister advise the House if the concept of minor employee contributions to encourage a cost-benefit relationship was reviewed?

MR. DUNFORD: The answer is no, because that would be a violation of the Meredith principle, wherein there is a no-fault insurance system that is put into place that looks after the medical costs and wage loss for an injured worker, and of course it is funded entirely through premiums of an employer.

Just as an aside, I remember a rookie that came into this House in 1993 that actually went further than question period, actually put it in a private member's bill. I think I still hold the record for being skunked the most.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the recent increases

in the WCB premiums in Alberta, could the minister advise the House: how does the WCB compare to private insurer options?

MR. DUNFORD: Comparisons are not only difficult but dangerous. The beauty of the workers' compensation system is that employers are required by law to be covered by injury insurance, and in Alberta and all of the other jurisdictions that have Workers' Compensation Board systems, the total cost, the total liability of all of that is then spread throughout all of those employers in all of those sectors. In a privatized system you're going to have cherry-picking, and you're going to have, then, a real disparity of coverage for workers.

Speaker's Ruling

Points of Order during Question Period

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, before calling on the first of four hon. members to participate in Members' Statements, just let me make a brief comment with respect to the operation of question period today, particularly the intervention of the point of order which was right at the very beginning.

Normally points of order are dealt with at the conclusion of question period, but today's point of order was such that if it had not been dealt with at the time it was dealt with, then there would have been a question of whether or not the questions being proposed by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition could have been proceeded with. Kind of hard to deal with that at the conclusion. It had to be dealt with at the time.

The time clock was kept running during that point of order, so for those hon. members who have sent me notes basically asking were they denied an opportunity to participate in a question today because the chair chose to deal with the point of order at the time, the answer to that question is no, they were not denied. In fact, today's question period went five minutes beyond the norm of 50 minutes; it went almost 55 minutes. In fact, there were 12 sets of questions raised today by hon. members, and the average tends to be about 11 and just above. So we are above the average in all of it, and it was the judicious thing to do.

Now, before dealing with Members' Statements, let me just point out to all members that today is the 10-year anniversary of the first election of the hon. Member for Little Bow, who arrived in this place by way of a by-election because, he says in a note to the chair, he was motivated determinedly by the Deputy Premier at the time who said publicly, quote: who cares about the Little Bow by-election?

I might also point out that today is the 61st anniversary of the arrival upon this planet Earth of the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

head: Members' Statements

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

Sid Hanson

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Tuesday I, along with a number of members of this Legislature, was a guest at the Edmonton Regional Airports Authority at a reception honouring Mr. Sid Hanson.

Sid Hanson retired from the Edmonton airports board of directors on December 31, 2001, following a distinguished 10 years as a founding board member and as the authority's second chair for the period 1997 through 2001. Sid has played an enduring leadership role in defining and delivering the vision of Edmonton airports as an industry leader. In 1998 his focus was on delivering new air service along with further development of the air terminal plan. With the very rapid growth in our market the authority launched its strategic vision for a \$300 million air terminal redevelopment.

2:30

I wish I could describe all of the accomplishments this outstanding Albertan has made to this province, but most of you will remember the grand opening of the southeast terminal in December 2000. It opened on time and under budget and opened in plenty of time to receive the world in 2001 for the grand events of July and August. Premier Klein was part of this magnificent event and was particularly pleased to see the scope and breadth of the authority's vision.

In summary, through the Sid Hanson era and particularly seen in the challenges of the last few months post 9-11, the authority has been able to continue to focus on the short-, medium-, and long-term future with the confidence and conviction that it has the right plan and the right team to guarantee industry leadership in delivering outstanding aviation and airport services to our capital region.

Thank you, Sid Hanson.

THE SPEAKER: To both the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark and the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, it's totally inappropriate to mention the names of individuals who are currently sitting and operating in this particular House and this particular parliament, so appropriate punishment will have to be meted out at a later opportunity.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Education System

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current teacher dispute has again raised the need for an independent look at our schools. Selecting a narrow set of achievement scores and, based on those scores, making the generalization that school and classroom conditions are better than they have ever been is the kind of denial that has blinded the government to the problems facing our schools and helped lead to today's strife. We need a truly independent look at education in the province. Such a commission could look at three basic questions.

First of all, what is. What is the state of our schools? Let's look at claims with respect to class size, parent fund-raising, the lack of basic resources such as textbooks, the need for support staff, and the exclusion of low-income students from some programs in schools.

Secondly, let's look at what should be. Albertans have firm and varied ideas as to how they want education shaped now and in the future. Let's look at concerns about the adequacy of funding formulas, small schools, rural education, program accessibility, fees, and program affordability.

Thirdly, what should be done. From such an examination will come a list of recommendations, a blueprint, if you will, for the future of the education system. The last examination of our schools reported in 1972. The Worth Commission on Educational Planning issued a report entitled *A Choice of Futures: A Future of Choices*. Suggestions in that report led to provincewide kindergartens, calling even then for the province to assume fiscal responsibility for K to 12 education in order to provide equity and foreshadowed schools such as the one in inner-city Edmonton now offering year-round schooling.

One of the first bills former Alberta Liberal leader Laurence Decore introduced in 1993 in the Legislature was a bill to establish a royal commission on education. In the 1990s Alberta Liberals repeated that request. Such an examination has long been needed. The problems the government faces today with teachers may well have been avoided if this work had been done a decade ago.

Thank you.

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

Sandra Ladwig

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does your mother love you? Was she thrilled by the miracle of your birth, or did you ruin her life? Does she hate you? These are questions asked every day by adult adoptees who may never have the chance to know their birth family. A painful, gaping wound that never heals leaves a hole in their hearts, and many adoptees who never find their birth family rarely experience true peace and wholeness in their lives. There are close to half a million people in Alberta affected by adoption. Adult adoptees, many with a blessing from their loving adoptive parents, search to find the answers that they have been asking for since they were old enough to understand.

Is the government able to make things right so that adult adoptees can access their birth records? Are adults not capable of and responsible for working out their own relationships? The government has acted in the best interests of the child by providing a loving adoptive family. Once a child becomes an adult, do they not have the right to their own personal information?

For 43 years Mrs. Sandra Ladwig has been searching for birth families. She has done this voluntarily with no wages or income because of the indescribable joy and priceless happiness that is experienced when the majority of birth families are reunited.

Sandra is truly an angel of mercy. Without any benefit to herself or her family she selflessly strives to unite families that are desperate to know each other. She has helped thousands of families over the past 43 years and receives at least 10 phone calls a week asking for help. Sandra has been encouraging the provincial government for the past 25 years to change legislation to open adoption records with a no-contact declaration.

Yesterday was Sandra's 61st birthday. She may be close to retirement, but this does not slow her down. She's determined to see that the right thing is done, and when it is time for her to retire, there will be no need for 10 phone calls a week.

Sandra knows better than anyone else these words of Robert Munsch:

I'll love you forever,
I'll like you for always,
as long as I'm living
my baby you'll be.

The time has come for adoption records to be opened. Then Sandra Ladwig will be able to retire knowing that birth families will be able to find each other when they are ready to.

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

Aboriginal Culture

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recognition of Native Awareness Week I would like to share with our colleagues a great life-enriching experience. Two summers ago I had the honour of being a guest at the powwow event in Lac La Biche, and I will remember that experience vividly. I was donned with full ceremonial headwear. I felt its weight on my head, but it was the spiritual and cultural value that has been impressed deeply in my feeling and my memory to this day and forever. I joined a parade of chiefs in the ceremonial dancing steps, in time with the chanting and the drumming. The sound, the sight, the colourful dresses, the friendly people in a beautiful natural setting of rolling hills and verdant woodland and the deep blue sky of Alberta: what an environment to be in.

I also realize that as Canadians having heritage from other lands,

we can always find the culture of our heritage in those lands if we feel the need, but our aboriginal culture can only be found here and nowhere else in the world. In fact, this experience made me realize that our aboriginal culture needs to be nurtured and sustained as part of Canadian and Albertan development.

I'd like to point out the need to understand the cultural differences. I would like to use the words of Professor James Dempsey of the University of Alberta. At Chief Big Bear's trial the charges were read out in court and ended with the statement that the offences were against the peace of our Lady the Queen, her crown and dignity. The translator could not find the Cree equivalent for many of the legal phrases. As a result, some words, such as the word "crown," were translated literally. Big Bear responded: "These people all lie. They are saying that I tried to steal the great mother's hat. How could I do that? She lives very far across the great water, and how could I go there to steal her hat? I don't want her hat, and I did not know that she had one." Dual interpretation of this kind of encounter exists to the present day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Presenting Reports by
Standing and Special Committees**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices I would like to table five copies of the report of the committee recommending the reappointment of Mr. Robert C. Clark as the Ethics Commissioner for a five-year term and of Olaf Brian Fjeldheim as the Chief Electoral Officer for the province of Alberta.

Thank you.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

**Bill 204
Traffic Safety (Cellular Phone)
Amendment Act, 2002**

MR. HERARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler I'm honoured to request leave to introduce Bill 204, the Traffic Safety (Cellular Phone) Amendment Act, 2002.

This bill would propose to legislate the safe and responsible use of handheld cellular phones while in the care and control of a motor vehicle.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

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

2:40 **Bill 205
School Trustee Statutes Amendment Act, 2002**

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I beg leave to introduce Bill 205, a bill being the School Trustee Statutes Amendment Act, 2002.

It is a bill in which I propose that the trustees and members of school boards are clearly able to understand the conflict of interest circumstances.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Bill 206

Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002

MR. DANYLUK: Mr. Speaker, I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Bill 207

Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to request leave to introduce Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act, on behalf of my colleague the MLA for Calgary-Mountain View.

The bill will enable the development of a value-added industry back into Alberta which has been stagnant under the Wheat Board since 1945.

[Motion carried; Bill 207 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: I have that the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East will be introducing a private member's bill today. Is there any member of the opposition caucus who will be proposing that bill on his behalf?

Then we will proceed to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Bill 209

Electoral Fairness Commission Act

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Electoral Fairness Commission Act.

The purpose of this bill, Mr. Speaker, is to establish a voting system ensuring that each political party's representation in the Legislative Assembly is broadly proportionate to its share of the provincewide popular vote.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 209 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Bill 210

**Matrimonial Property (Division of Property
on Death) Amendment Act, 2002**

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to request leave to introduce a bill on behalf of the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, the bill being Bill 210, the Matrimonial Property (Division of Property on Death) Amendment Act, 2002.

[Motion carried; Bill 210 read a first time]

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

Bill 208

Fiscal Stability Fund Calculation Act

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague

the Member for Lethbridge-East I request leave to introduce a bill being the Fiscal Stability Fund Calculation Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 208 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE CLERK: Pursuant to Standing Order 37.1(2) I wish to provide acknowledgment that the following required tablings were deposited today with the office of the Clerk by the hon. Mr. Mar. These are annual reports for the years 2000-2001 for the Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists, the Alberta Health Facilities Review Committee, the Alberta Mental Health Board, the Chinook health region, the Palliser health authority, the Headwaters health authority, the Calgary health region, the David Thompson health region, the East Central health region, the WestView regional health authority, the Crossroads regional health authority, the Capital health authority, the Lakeland regional health authority, the Peace health region, the Northern Lights regional health services, and the Northwestern health services region.

In addition, the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk by the hon. Mr. Mar: the Alberta Cancer Board annual report, 2000-2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the proper number of copies to table today on behalf of the Evergreen local ATA members.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a letter from myself to the Premier asking for an investment in Alberta's future to adequately fund child care and pay early childhood educators at a reasonable level.

My second tabling today is five copies of a report entitled *The Shame of Canada's Nursing Homes: A Testimony of the Experiences of Older Persons in Care Facilities in Canada*. This report was prepared by FAIRE, Families Allied to Influence Responsible Eldercare, and it's looking at what's happening in our eldercare facilities and seeking solutions to respect the rights and privileges of our older persons.

Thank you.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with the privilege that I've been asked to table copies of a petition collected in Canmore expressing very serious concerns about reductions in health services in that town. It has been signed by 256 persons, a substantial portion of that population.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter that I received a couple of weeks ago from the executive director of the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter. In this letter the director has raised some serious concerns about the appropriateness of the language of the Alberta Children's Services survey. She

draws particular attention to the confused goals of the survey. She wonders whether it's to improve services or to justify reduction in services, plus she is very concerned about the systematic bias built into the questions that Albertans are invited to answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table the required number of copies relative to questions posed in the House by Her Majesty's opposition and hope that they will suffice as an answer for the first part of the issues that arose.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: **Second Reading**

Bill 1

Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Recognition Act

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development on behalf of the hon. Premier.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my great pleasure and privilege on behalf of our hon. Premier to rise and move Bill 1, Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Recognition Act, for second reading.

Mr. Speaker, this is truly a unique and wonderful bill, a great piece of legislation. I want to congratulate our Premier for sponsoring it and bringing it to this House, and I want to thank all of my colleagues for supporting it. It is truly a unique occasion. We haven't seen anything like it in the history of our province and of this Legislature, and we and our successors are not likely to see anything like it again, certainly not for a long time to come. The British monarchy has had more than its share of long-lived monarchs, but even among them golden jubilees have been rare. So I think it is most appropriate to take time to appreciate this very special moment. We are in fact the first Alberta Legislative Assembly to celebrate a monarch's golden jubilee, and we could well be the last. That may not be a momentous achievement as things go in the world today, but it is a special achievement nonetheless. It's an important occasion for most Albertans. Above all, it's a very happy occasion, and such occasions can be all too rare in this very frantic and fragile world.

2:50

I can't help but draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that the Queen's jubilee year coincides quite happily with another jubilee achievement. Princess Elizabeth, as we know, ascended the throne of Great Britain on February 6, 1952. Sixteen days later an Alberta team of amateur hockey players, the Edmonton Mercurys, including our good friend Billy Gibson, ascended the podium as gold medalists at the 1952 Olympic Games. On February 6, 2002, Queen Elizabeth celebrated the 50th anniversary of her ascension and, may we call it coincidence or call it destiny, a professional team of Canadian hockey players marked the occasion by winning the gold medal at the 2002 Olympic Games. Not all of the 2002 Olympic hockey champions are Albertans, but some of them are, and I'm prepared to acknowledge all of them as honorary Albertans. In the meantime, we have two golden moments to celebrate now and to remember and treasure for years to come: one of them in honour of the Queen and one of them in honour of all Canadians. We know that the Queen has special regard for Canada, and I am confident that she, too, rejoiced with the rest of us when the gold medal came home to Canada.

As I'm sure you know, Mr. Speaker, our province has a unique

connection with the royal family. It was named after Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, the fourth daughter of another long-lived British queen, Her Majesty Queen Victoria. Of course, our Legislature colleagues from Banff-Cochrane and Rocky Mountain House would remind us that it is a distinction that we share with the jewel of the Rockies, Lake Louise, and the thriving foothills community of Caroline. When Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne, that occasion was marked by the naming of many streets, parks, schools, hospitals, and other very familiar landmarks throughout our province, reminders to this day of that event and that happy occasion.

In 1952, when Queen Elizabeth II was just beginning her reign, Alberta was looking forward to and making plans for its golden jubilee in 1955. Now, as the Queen celebrates her golden jubilee, the province is getting ready and making plans for our 100th birthday, our centennial, in 2005. As Minister of Community Development I have the great privilege of being the minister responsible for both these landmark events, the recognition of the Queen's golden jubilee and the celebration of Alberta's centennial. I know there will be many synergies between the two celebrations, and I look forward to participating further in the planning and in the sharing of the results with my colleagues in this House and, indeed, with all Albertans.

But I'm not here just to dwell on the past, Mr. Speaker, and to point out happy coincidences. Jubilee and centennial celebrations are as much about the future as they are, of course, a salute to the past. I'm pleased to announce that Bill 1 establishes two Queen's golden jubilee scholarships, that will be awarded annually to outstanding students in the visual and performing arts fields. They will be administered by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, which will look for young artists who show exceptional talent and potential, supported by clear educational goals and objectives. The years of Queen Elizabeth's reign have seen a remarkable growth of the arts in our province, Mr. Speaker, and I know you to be personally a great supporter of that cause, as are all members of this House, I'm sure, both in terms of quality and quantity. I should point out that there are awards-cum-scholarships already available for the literary arts through our Community Development sponsored Grant MacEwan awards for the literary arts. Hence these two new scholarships will focus on the visual and performing arts.

Mr. Speaker, in 1952 most Alberta artists, like our Olympic champions of the day, were amateurs, dedicated amateurs who knew that they had to be builders and lay strong foundations for future growth. They built those foundations and built them well, as our first-class artists, art organizations, and their appreciative audiences regularly demonstrate. As a mature arts community we are now producing many talented, focused young artists with legitimate ambitions to become world-class professional performers, artists, and educators. These two Queen's golden jubilee scholarships will bring well-earned recognition to Alberta's arts community by selecting two of the best and brightest students and showcasing their talent, their vision, and their abilities. Inspired by those who have laid these foundations, these young people will leave lasting impressions and impacts in Alberta and, in some cases, abroad. Mr. Speaker, this is the most significant recognition that the arts in our province have received in a long, long while, and to have them surface and highlighted in Bill 1, a bill sponsored by our hon. Premier, is indeed an accolade of large proportion.

Bill 1 also establishes the Premier's citizenship award, which will be given to one student each year in each high school in Alberta for outstanding contributions through their citizenship, leadership, community service, and volunteerism. As well, the Queen's Golden Jubilee Citizenship Medal will be awarded each year to the most outstanding five students from among those who are receiving an

award under the Premier's citizenship award referred to earlier. I'm very proud to be associated with this program, and I look forward to meeting the first recipients of these awards and meeting many more after that.

Mr. Speaker, let me close by saying that the second Elizabethan era has been good to Alberta. We have thrived and prospered as perhaps no other part of Canada and few parts of the world. From one of the poorest and most remote parts of the country we have grown and matured to become one of the wealthiest, one of the strongest, one of the most stable provinces in the Confederation. Thanks to tremendous changes in transportation, communication, and other foundations of our province, this growth is expected to continue and to be very healthy throughout its reign. No one, not even the Queen herself, would claim that she is responsible for our success, but that does not mean that we cannot recognize and appreciate her as a symbol of our good fortune and celebrate her jubilee as a way of celebrating and giving thanks for the peace and prosperity that have marked the Elizabethan era in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, earlier last summer, as part of the 2001 world games I had the great privilege of hosting two members of the royal family for a very special luncheon, which focused around the youth of this province. Bill 1 in a similar vein is also dedicated to celebrating and saluting our youth in Alberta.

On behalf of all my colleagues I express our deep thanks to Her Majesty for 50 outstanding years, and may I close by saying: long may she reign, and long may Alberta prosper under her reign.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill 1 and to heartily endorse and support the action of the government in choosing to mark the golden jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in a manner such as they have done; that is, making it possible for our young people in our high schools to be recognized and through that recognition to further their education.

I think that the whole notion of citizenship awards is going to be rather interesting in terms of the schools when they try to make those. Before I talk actually, though, about the citizenship awards themselves, I'd like to express the real need that we in the opposition see for a wide range of scholarships and a wide range of grants. The costs of education in our province are rising, and there's always been the concern that students whose families lack fiscal resources may be excluded from some of our institutions. So the more opportunities that can be provided for scholarships and for grants, I think, the better students will be. But I don't think that in any way it should remove the obligation of the government to make sure that schooling, the public schools, are open to all youngsters regardless of the parents' ability to pay and that our postsecondary institutions welcome students, again, not based on their ability to pay.

3:00

With that aside I'd like to look at the awards being in the two categories that were chosen, citizenship and visual and performing arts. I know that one of our local high schools already has a citizenship award, and I think it speaks to the importance that that high school attaches to leadership in the school and particularly volunteering and community service. So schools, I'm sure, in many parts of the province are already very aware of the need to encourage citizenship and to have in place rewards for those youngsters who exhibit exemplary leadership skills. It's going to be interesting to watch as the criteria for awarding the citizenship awards are

developed, because there are some very conflicting views of citizenship that have been traditionally held.

The first view is a more conservative view, and that is the view of a citizen and the citizen's obligations. That notion is that you have an obligation as a citizen in a democracy to promote and to serve the common good, and it's a position that often has, in fact in most cases has the public good being placed before the private good. So it's a conception of citizenship that really focuses heavily on a citizen's obligations.

The second conception of citizenship is one that we hear of often these days, and that is the citizen's rights: the rights of a citizen to have protection from the government, the rights of citizens to promote individual liberty, and the rights of citizens to promote their individual interests. There's even – and you hear this often at election time – a cry from people who are very deep into the citizens' rights movement to insist that even voting in an election or not voting in an election is their right as a citizen, and any move to encourage them to vote or any laws such as exist in other countries to make voting mandatory they would oppose with great vigour.

So there are two, as I said, somewhat conflicting views of citizenship, and I suspect it's the former, citizenship and your obligations as a citizen, that is emphasized, and maybe most appropriately, in the schools of the province. But it will be interesting to see how students are judged with respect to the receiving of the awards.

A quote was, I think, attributed to Adlai Stevenson, and that quote was: "As citizens of this democracy, you are the rulers and the ruled, the lawgivers and the law-abiding, the beginning and the end." I think that that notion of a citizen is one that we borrow from liberally in our country.

The awards, as I said, are very appropriate. The selection of citizenship, I think, in some ways may be ironic if it's a citizenship award being sponsored in the name of a monarch, but those ironies aside I think they're excellent awards.

I'm also very pleased with the visual and the performing arts awards being included as part of this marking of the golden jubilee. The great focus in the province the last number of years on technology and on the sciences, I think, in some cases has been at the expense of the visual and performing arts. In fact, all arts and humanities, I think, have suffered. There have been pleas from those who would speak in the interests of the humanities for greater recognition, and for that reason I am pleased to see that it was deemed appropriate to select out the visual and performing arts for two of the awards.

All in all, it's an awards program that should have a widespread effect across the province, Mr. Speaker, when every school will address the notion of what it means to be a good citizen and what it means to be a good citizen with respect to that particular student body.

With those few comments I'd conclude, Mr. Speaker, and congratulate the government for bringing forward Bill 1. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre then. Harmony here in the House. Good.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to speak briefly to this bill because it involves scholarships and students, and I have so many students that live in my riding.

To me the Queen has been on the throne and the ruler of the Commonwealth and associated with Canada my entire life, and I'm glad of the opportunity of having something to associate the Queen with besides her occasional appearances on television and her Christmas messages. This brings it a little closer to home.

I know when I was in high school and, I think, going into university, there was such a thing as a Princess Elizabeth scholarship. I'm not sure if that was honouring her specifically; I'm assuming that it was. I think those scholarships are probably known as the Rutherford scholarships now, but it's nice to see that this has come full circle.

I am particularly impressed with the goal of assisting the future development of Alberta youth. Certainly education is, I think, a major route into great possibilities for Alberta youth and particularly when we don't have to look very far into the future to see the need for skilled workforces and knowing that intellectual property or intellectual pursuits will become the future manufacturing product. That's what we'll be looking mostly to deal with: the intellectual property and pursuits.

Secondly, I like to see citizenship as a cornerstone, and I hope that maybe in the future we'll be able to expand some programming around this scholarship program that does really get out there and try and encourage especially young people to engage more actively in promoting citizenship through a number of things, through things like keeping up on current affairs, on voting, which, I'm afraid, is not very appealing to our young people these days. I think that in some cases the government policies reflect that. So keeping up on current affairs, voting, community involvement, in particular volunteering. You get a better sense of the community that you're in if you are able to volunteer and work with other people that are out in that community.

3:10

I did have one question. When I look at the scholarship for the visual and performing arts, it's not specific whether it is just for the same high school students as – the Premier's citizenship award says that it goes to "one student in each high school in Alberta." Then it goes on to talk about: out of those students "the 5 most outstanding" receive the medal. Then it talks about the visual and performing arts scholarship. It's separate. Does that mean that postsecondary students could apply for it, or is there a cutoff? It's only for high school students?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: It starts after grade 12.

MS BLAKEMAN: It starts after grade 12. Great. Oh, that's wonderful. That's even better. Okay. Terrific.

I'm really glad to see this because there are not as many bursaries and scholarships available for students that are pursuing any of the arts, and I can certainly speak from experience there. So it's really nice to see one, especially for that kind of money. It is a significant contribution.

Now, I just had a few other questions. When I look at the criteria for the citizenship award, it's saying that the recognitions, the details of it, will be prescribed by regulation, and I'm just wondering why that was done here. The details are given quite clearly for the other two, yet when it gets to that one, it says, well, check the regulations. I never, especially with this government, like to see things go into regulations, because they sort of disappear into a black hole. You know, it's very difficult for the public to find when the regulations come out. It's very difficult for them to track and actually find a copy of the regulations and find out what's supposed to be going on. So I would far prefer to see whatever the criteria is built into the legislation.

This is obviously meant to be a feel-good bill, a sort of Canadian version of Mom and apple pie, a do-nice, be-nice sort of bill, and I appreciate that. I think it's perfectly appropriate that we mark a significant event in someone's life with something significant like

this. But, in closing, I'm not going to relent from urging this government to consider the many other ways that we could be assisting the future development of Alberta youth, particularly when we look at the possibility of restoring prevention programs, restoring early intervention programs for youth, reviewing and prioritizing and properly funding the RHAs for their programs. Same thing: adequately funding the children's authorities and their programs for youth.

So if we're really looking to promote youth and citizenship and health and well-being and even the attainment of a postsecondary education, I think there's more to it than offering a scholarship, as valuable as that is, and I encourage the government to be more vigilant in that area.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of this bill. All things considered, I think it's a good idea, and I'm pleased to see the province choosing to do something which will enhance youth and particularly which would encourage youth towards a postsecondary education in whatever area.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Gaming.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 1.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 2
Child and Family Services Authorities
Amendment Act, 2002

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

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just briefly to recap the intent of the Child and Family Services Authorities Amendment Act, 2002, as I cited the other day. Extensive consultation with all of our partners, including the 18 child and family service authorities, their board members, and chief executive officers, took place. Partnering departments consulted were Justice, Health and Wellness, Learning, Human Resources and Employment, Community Development, and International and Intergovernmental Relations. As a result, these amendments have come forward.

Mr. Speaker, I think that most significantly the intent of this act will clarify the board nomination appointment process, the governance roles of the boards, and their accountability to the Minister of Children's Services. If the proposed amendments are passed, I believe that it's safe to say that there will be a much clearer understanding of the role of the authorities and a much clearer articulation of the process for selection.

I would be remiss, however, if I didn't cite just one thing. This past year we had a lay member, if you will, that assisted in the board selection process. It was highly successful with very few complaints as a result.

With that, I would pass to other speakers who may wish to comment on this amendment act.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about Bill 2, the Child and Family Services Authorities Amendment Act, 2002. I have to begin by thanking the minister for showing me the courtesy of a briefing on the bill before it was introduced. I found that very valuable, and it's consistent

with her past practice, and I really do thank her for it. I think it makes for better consideration of the legislation and a fuller understanding of what the government intends. I don't think it means that we're always going to agree, but it's a practice that I applaud and thank her for.

The changes before us in Bill 2 have appeared to be primarily administrative, but I think that when we read through them, the question that does arise is: is there a shift of power through Bill 2 of more authority back to the minister's office? I guess I would pose it as a question to the minister. Was that one of the intents, that there would be that kind of a shift? It would be understandable, Mr. Speaker, if that is what has occurred, because there has been a great deal of difficulty with some of the authorities in terms of them carrying out their mandates and there's been a great deal of difficulty with a number of them in terms of their ability to provide services with the budgets that they have been allocated from the government. So I guess underlying this: is there a principle that says that there should be more authority in the office of the minister?

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

I think there's an attempt to provide some clarity. I think trying to make more clear the distinction between the authority and the board is probably a useful thing to have done, and it will serve all of us in the long run.

The notion of the size of boards is an interesting one, and I think the reducing of the number of members is probably appropriate. I remember the battles that have gone on about the number of school trustees that there should be and in this city and in Calgary the moving back from seven school trustees to nine. The kinds of arguments that are made about representation with respect to the size of the board I think are rather interesting. It seems to me that some of the boards, given their size, were unruly and that the reduction to 11 will serve everyone and certainly expedite the business of the boards.

3:20

There are a number of questions again besides the centralization that need to be raised, but I think maybe some of them are more appropriate when we get into the detailed discussion of the bills at the committee stage, Mr. Speaker.

So, with that, I think I'll conclude. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw.

MRS. ADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to bring forward my support for Bill 2, the Child and Family Services Authorities Amendment Act, 2002. The Child and Family Services Authorities Amendment Act is necessary to clarify the board nomination and appointment process, governance roles of the boards, and their accountability to the Minister of Children's Services. The proposed amendments are the result of a comprehensive review of the act carried out in the fall of 2000.

Consultations have taken place with stakeholders including the boards and chief executive officers of the 18 child and family service authorities. The partnering departments of Justice, Health and Wellness, Learning, Human Resources and Employment, Community Development, and International and Intergovernmental Relations have also been consulted. The proposed amendments are the result of this consultation.

The preamble of the act will highlight the principles of early intervention and integration. The current preamble does not sufficiently highlight early intervention and integration as important

components of the community governance model. These principles will be separated, and it will be clarified that integration of programs and services is best achieved through partnerships in communities and other ministries. This will result in a preamble that more clearly reflects the principles underlying the community governance model.

The amended preamble will also clarify that while boards are responsible or answerable to their communities, they are ultimately accountable to the Minister of Children's Services. The amendment will remove the two consecutive term limitation for a board member and replace it with a seven consecutive year limitation. In addition, the minister will have the authority to extend the seven consecutive year limitation. When a vacancy on a board arises before the end of the board's full three-year term, a new member is appointed only until the end of the term. Because of their shortened term these new members do not have an opportunity to serve the full three-year term. The proposed amendment will allow a board member to fill an interim vacancy of a short duration and thereafter continue to serve the equivalent of two three-year terms. The flexibility provided through this approach will assist with the retention of good board members and help ensure continuity of expertise.

The act proposes to reduce the maximum board membership from 15 to 11 and grandfather those boards with more than 11 members until such a time as attrition reduces the membership to 11. Mr. Speaker, fewer members will strengthen the governance role of the boards, as a 15-member board may be difficult to manage. Decreased board sizes will also alleviate difficulties with board recruitment.

The act will also clarify that a resident of a First Nations reserve with the geographical boundaries of a child and family service authority is a resident in that region and is therefore eligible to sit as a member of the board.

The proposed amendments will clarify that the board of a child and family service authority governs rather than administers the CFSA. The changes will be clear that CFSA boards govern on behalf of and are subject to any parameters set by the Minister of Children's Services. Sections 8 and 9 will be amended to specifically authorize the minister to provide the boards with written governance expectations and to require those boards to comply with those expectations.

These amendments will further strengthen the concept of board governance and clarify the accountability of the boards to the minister. It is proposed that amendments provide the minister with regulation-making authority with respect to four specific matters: one, listing of core child and family services; two, roles and responsibilities of board chairs; three, confidentiality; and four, conflict of interest. Regulating these matters will provide needed clarity and consistency across the province and will further strengthen responsibility to the community and accountability to the Minister of Children's Services.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any questions or comments for the Member for Calgary-Shaw? Seeing none, anybody else wish to speak on this bill?

The hon. Minister for Children's Services to close debate.

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, in closing, I'd like to just make one brief comment to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. On the face of it one would assume that there would be increased power to the minister, but the thrust of this is increased accountability by the boards. The boards must submit their financial statements on time and must make every effort to adhere to the principles, the budgetary framework, and the policies that are contained therein. So while we

view it as accountability, there may be some who view that it gives the minister more power, but it's not so much the power of the minister as it is the enforced accountability. That is what we hope to clarify.

Originally when the boards were defined, they were more at the discretion of their local authorities' domains. In other words, they could chart more of their own course, and there has been a subtle shift in emphasis, one being that the staff stayed on because of the successor-right issue. They are still provincial staff, so that was different than the original definition of the board. So they are perhaps more linked to the department by design than that.

The second is that unlike the boards of education or the regional health authorities, they do not have the prerogative of accumulating any surpluses, and they do not have the prerogative of conducting themselves with a more autonomous framework. They must be participants in the overall framework under the current design. So this attempts to clarify that and attempts to clarify that while they have the duty to their communities, they have due diligence and a duty as well to the ministry and to the department and to the other boards who may or may not have the resources to complete the task for a year.

Our current challenge, if I may, is to make sure that we refine the funding formula so that everybody will get fairly funded on the basis of what their own menu is, their own demographics are, and this will assure that the minister will be able to make those sharings possible, particularly at year-end when there might be some that could have accumulated surplus and some that could have accumulated deficits.

Now, it raises several other issues really when you think about that because we're working with them to try and refine the formula, but in the meantime this is to just assure that there are some very clear guidelines for the authority of the minister, the authority of the board and the CEO in response to the various issues, and primarily, honestly budget drove a good part of that.

With that, I would conclude on this motion.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

Bill 9

Child Welfare Amendment Act, 2002

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, just briefly. There will be others, no doubt, that would speak to this, and in conjunction with my introduction in the House the other day in the reading of Bill 9, I believe that the amendments proposed here will enable us to be more effective in doing the business of child welfare delivery.

One thing I should profile is that the amendments allowing the Child Welfare Appeal Panel to be bound by the policies of the resources for children with disabilities program is our very strong attempt to make sure that we are not governing or administering programs by appeal but that we are administering programs by policy. We have an expert panel that will be adjudicating some of our programs in this regard so that we put a framework out about what should and should not pertain and so that we will put families through much less agony, if you will, in the appeal process. So this will establish a framework. It will be clearly understood by the families, and it is not in any way an attempt to make it difficult for families to follow the appeal process but to make it less necessary for them to appeal and make the governance quite clear in the manner in which our policies are administered. So while the legislation may be the first point that's coming through to the House, the really significant item is the work that is currently going on behind the scenes in meetings with parents and discussion of special-needs children with the staff in Children's Services.

3:30

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

MR. CENAIKO: Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring forward my support for Bill 9, the Child Welfare Amendment Act. As part of the current Child Welfare Act review now under way I have been traveling the province listening to concerns Albertans have about the present act. These concerns are wide ranging, and recommendations will not be incorporated into the act until spring 2003, but I'm very committed to improving life for Alberta's children and youth. As a former member of the Calgary Police Service I was involved with hundreds of cases, in fact some of them with you, Mr. Speaker, dealing with abused children. The health and safety of children throughout Alberta is critically important, and it is an area I am most concerned with.

While recommendations from the Child Welfare Act review won't come before this House for another year, currently we have some minor amendments before us in Bill 9. The bill proposes amendments specific to particular portions of the Child Welfare Act. The amendments will change current legislation to allow for interprovincial movement of children who are involved with child welfare. Bill 9 would allow an apprehension order carried out in another province or territory to be considered as an apprehension in Alberta. The proposed amendment will apply, where it is determined by child welfare officials, in both the apprehending jurisdiction and in Alberta if it is in the child's best interest to be cared for in Alberta. This approach is consistent with the Premier's commitment to co-ordinate child welfare programs interprovincially.

The act will also streamline the telephone application process for apprehension orders. Amendments will authorize a justice of the peace, in addition to judges of the Provincial Court, to handle telephone applications for apprehension orders. The changes apply to occasions when it is impractical for a child welfare worker to appear personally before a judge or a justice of the peace to make an application for an apprehension order. Through Bill 9 a child welfare worker would be able to speak directly with a justice of the peace rather than have to page the judge on call. Justices of the peace are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to handle other similar court matters. Section 17 of the act provides that a justice of the peace may handle in person applications for apprehension orders. The changes would simply extend this authority to include telephone applications.

Other amendments will allow the Child Welfare Appeal Panel to be bound by the policies of the resources for children with disabilities program when rendering RCD agreement decisions, resources for children with disabilities. These policies are established by the Minister of Children's Services. The Child Welfare Appeal Panel is a quasi-judicial body established by the minister. The panel may hear appeals respecting various decisions made by a director of child welfare including decisions relating to the terms of a resources for children with disabilities agreement. Because the appeal panel is not currently bound by policy, decisions concerning RCD matters may be overturned by the panel. As a result, the ministry has no way to maintain the integrity of the resources for children with disabilities program or to control program costs. Appeals regarding RCD agreements make up approximately 59 percent of the Child Welfare Appeal Panel caseload. This high percentage is due to the fact that the RCD program has no statutory or regulatory parameters. The proposed amendment is supported by a recent decision of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I ask for support to these amendments to the Child Welfare Act in order to accomplish three goals: one, allow for smooth co-ordination of interprovincial child welfare issues; two,

efficiency in telephone applications for apprehension orders; and three, ensure that the Child Welfare Appeal Panel is bound by resources for children with disabilities policy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With that, I move to adjourn debate on Bill 9.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 3

Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2002

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

MR. McFARLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to move second reading of Bill 3, Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments are designed to help our irrigation districts manage the water allocated to them more effectively and more efficiently. I don't have to remind this Assembly that in a year of predicted water shortages, managing our resources has never been so important as this year. In the southern area of our province the impact of irrigation is irrefutable; 80 percent of southern Alberta's agricultural production and 70 percent of our processing is directly linked to irrigation. More than 1.3 million acres of crops are grown within our 13 irrigation districts, totaling nearly 20 percent of the province's agricultural gross domestic product.

Irrigation means more than economic benefits, Mr. Speaker. Nearly 50 communities, varying in size up to and including the city of Lethbridge, use irrigation water for their domestic use. Water provided by irrigation districts also serves industrial users. Water enhances fish and wildlife. Water enhances our recreational opportunities. This legislation, which helps our irrigation districts to use water more efficiently and more effectively, has positive, wide-ranging impacts.

As a background to this legislation I would like to remind members that after two years of review by all the stakeholders, the Irrigation Districts Act was passed in 1999. I would like to acknowledge our Minister of Gaming, who chaired that particular review, which came into force in the year 2000.

The act applies only to irrigation districts within the 13 that I've outlined in Alberta. It does not impact or apply to the 250,000 acres of private irrigation, which is under separate licence throughout the province. Through the Irrigation Districts Act in 1999 we gave these 13 irrigation districts more autonomy and greater responsibility. They now have the capacity, the rights, the powers, and the privileges of a natural person, subject to certain limitations set out under the act, regulations, and bylaws.

We changed the role of the Irrigation Council from one that approved many of the day-to-day operations of the districts to one that now monitors the operations and financial performances of the districts and acts on behalf of the minister as required. It also conducts hearings with respect to petitions and all other matters of appeal.

Mr. Speaker, this new act provides greater flexibility in managing water to meet crop production requirements and also allows more effective use of water. Our amendments to this act are a direct result of consultation with the stakeholders. After working with the new legislation that was proclaimed in 1999 for two years, the irrigation districts identified that some sections of the legislation needed clarification in order to honour its original intent. The amendments will make it clear that users of small volumes of water can receive water from an irrigation district for purposes other than irrigation, as they have in the past, and they will not require a separate water licence to do so under the Water Act.

Other amendments facilitate the transfer of small portions of an

irrigation district's licensed water allocation or small changes to the expansion limit of the irrigation district itself. There are other amendments, Mr. Speaker, not substantial in nature, which are included in order to clarify the existing legislation, to eliminate some ambiguities, and to correct some minor contradictions. With your indulgence I'll briefly highlight three changes that we're proposing.

3:40

Section 11 would allow the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, upon a request by an irrigation district, to waive the requirements for a plebiscite when an irrigation district proposes to transfer a small part of the water licence. When I spoke with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, the New Democratic ag critic, I know that he was concerned about this particular section, and I know he'll listen to these following comments as well. Certainly this would only be done if the minister is satisfied that the volume of water to be transferred is so small that it wouldn't have a significant effect on the overall water supply to the balance of the irrigators in the district.

As well, under proposed changes to section 12 of the act the minister could also waive the requirement for a plebiscite when an irrigation district proposes to change its expansion limit. Again, this would only be done if the minister were fully satisfied that such a change wouldn't have a significant impact on the overall water supply to the balance of the district's irrigators.

These are good changes, I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that will allow the irrigation districts to manage their allocated water. None of these changes would increase the volume of water allocated to any irrigation district, so nobody would receive less than what is currently going past the delivery point. The water allocated to irrigation districts remains as defined in the water licences issued to them by Alberta Environment under the Water Act.

I'll now move on to the proposed changes for section 19 of the Irrigation Districts Act. Here we're proposing to create a new rural water use category. This would allow the use of a maximum of 25,000 cubic metres, or approximately 20 acre-feet, of water annually for purposes other than household or irrigation. As it stands, without the amendments many people who used to receive water from an irrigation district are now technically in contravention of this existing act because their annual volumes exceed the one acre-foot which we're now proposing to move to 20. Under the old irrigation act and the water resources act there was no volume specified in the definition of domestic or household use, and this will clarify that. This new category of use will also allow those users to continue to receive water for such things as shelterbelts, small livestock operations, small industries, or wildlife habitat projects.

I think it's very important to remember, Mr. Speaker, that it was the irrigation districts that asked us to make this change so that they can continue to serve their water users in a better fashion. These 20 acre-foot maximum volumes are very small in relation to the total volume of water that the irrigation districts manage. In many instances it represents less than 3 percent of their total allocation under their current water licence, but it is enough for maybe a small feedlot or a small industry like a small dairy farm. I want to stress that any medium or large user, such as a large confined feeding operation or a large industry, would still need to apply to Alberta Environment for their own water licence under the Water Act. We're not changing that.

Finally, I'd like to outline proposed changes to section 26. When an irrigator applies to transfer irrigation acres to another parcel, he or she must provide written confirmation from all mortgagees that they consent to the transfer. This ensures that the holder of the mortgage on the parcel from which the irrigation acres are being

transferred is informed and consents to the transfer, as the removal of the irrigation acres could significantly reduce the value of their property. When the act came into force in 2000, Mr. Speaker, the banking industry and the irrigation districts noted a potential problem, but they worked together and found a solution and implemented that solution on a voluntary basis until we could make the necessary amendment to this legislation. I want to commend them for all working together on this issue. This amendment simply formalizes the process agreed to by the irrigation districts and the lending agencies.

So with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I close the debate on second reading. I do want to thank the 13 irrigation districts, all the stakeholders, and the water users for their participation in proposing these amendments. I particularly would like to thank the Irrigation Council and the director down there for helping put this together. I would acknowledge that we've met with the hon. Leader of the Opposition, our agriculture critic, and I look forward to hearing his comments.

Thank you.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak to Bill 3, the Irrigation Districts Amendment Act, 2002. I want to begin by thanking the Member for Little Bow and also the secretary of the Irrigation Council, Mr. Len Ring, for the information they provided to me in terms of helping to understand the debate and the discussion that went on in the community and within the drafting of the bill so that we could understand fully the implications of it.

I guess the focus of the bill really has to do with some of the things that are important as we move into looking at how we're going to manage water in the province. The issue that we have to look at here is: is the set of amendments that we're being provided with today going to really contribute to that? A lot of the issues that came up, as the Member for Little Bow said, are being developed and put in place in response to requests from irrigation districts to help make their management decisions and their processes user-friendly and administration friendly, administration easy, and that's the kind of thing we have to kind of look at.

The process that we go through in dealing with this I think has to look at quite a number of different aspects. In reflecting on the discussions that I had with the Member for Little Bow and the head of the Irrigation Council, the only question that has come up in my mind since that time and then reading the bill, you know, as it's finally put on paper, has to deal with the changes that are occurring in section 11. This focuses on the ability of an irrigation district to petition the minister to basically allow for a partitioning of their acreage to change the definition of their licence, the acres served.

In the proposal now it talks about the idea that the minister can waive the requirement of a plebiscite. What I would like to put out is a question at this point. If we look at the full section that's being amended, there is a provision in the early parts of that section for public meetings connected with the application to transfer an allocation of water. I would like some clarification.

When I put the original act together with the amendments, I don't really see if it flows through that those kind of public meetings have to be held prior to the request to a minister to make a waiver of the plebiscite. The act basically says that these public meetings have to be held to provide information for members of the district in order to prepare them for the vote on a plebiscite. But if the district chooses instead for a small allocation, can the district go straight to the minister, or do they have to go through the public awareness process? Because if they're not going to actually go to a plebiscite,

it's not a how-to-vote or what-your-vote-means type of a public meeting. It's more just a process of saying: we intend to ask the minister to allow us to go ahead with this without having a plebiscite, and this will be the consequence of this change in our licence. I would suggest that that would be important so that the members of the district are not caught unawares, and I support the idea that, you know, there is not a number associated with what constitutes a significant transfer.

3:50

I don't think we want to start saying that it's 10 acre-feet or it's so many cubic metres per second or anything like that. That's not for us to make a judgment on, but we need to have a process in place where the community members – in other words, the participants in that irrigation district – have an option to, in their own mind, somehow judge whether or not the transfer is going to be significant or not, because that's what in effect would happen if there was a plebiscite. So if the minister is going to make an exception, we want to make sure, if there are members in the district community who sense that there may be some complications associated with that transfer, that there's a process for them, first of all, to get good information and to express their view to the minister before the minister makes the decision.

You know, I think it's important that the public know about this before they read it in the paper or get it through the district newsletter that some of their licence has been adjusted. So in that context, as we move into the next stage of debate and get into committee, I would hope that the government looks at just that sequencing and whether or not they really feel comfortable that enough public awareness is present before the minister makes a decision. If the minister is only going to make a decision based on the information presented from the board, there is the possibility there that they're getting a one-sided view, because obviously the minister is going to get the information from the board. The minister will also get information from the proponents of the transfer, but there needs to be a process so that if there potentially may be some members of the district, you know, participants, holders of part of that licence or holders of an agreement with the district for access to water through that licence, they should be given the chance to just say: hold it; we need some more information; we need to be given a better explanation.

As we move into that part of the discussion where we're dealing with sectional analysis in committee, I would hope that the Member for Little Bow explains how that input will occur, because in looking at the act, I see a very good definition of what happens before a plebiscite but not quite as clear a definition of what happens before a ministerial decision. That needs to be clarified.

In the whole first section, where the public notice applies to the ministerial decision, it needs to be put into the section there about the ministerial part of it. What it says now is that "where the Minister waives the requirement of a plebiscite . . . the board must" and then goes through a public notification process. Well, I would like to see the public notification process be before the minister makes that decision so that if there is a community action or a community concern, then the community can, you know, effectively have input to the minister before the decision is made. Now, I want to clarify again that when I'm talking about the community, I'm talking about the individuals who participate in the licence, not necessarily, you know, every world citizen. So that's the kind of clarification I guess I would ask, because the Member for Little Bow, you know, specifically illustrated that section when he was introducing the bill in second reading. Other than that, Mr. Speaker, I think the bill does a lot to facilitate some of the administrative

issues both in terms of partitioning off or adding to some of the irrigation districts.

I think this is something that's going to really be significant as we move into some of the future debate about water in terms of what happens to licences, how do we deal with licences, and who has control over those licences. What we're seeing is that when the administrative costs in some of the irrigation districts are really quite small, it may be quite convenient and quite cost-effective for some of those to start discussing the possibility of how do they, you know, combine some of that administration. This bill would go to the point of facilitating the possibility of a union of a couple of those smaller irrigation districts if they agree to come together, and it allows the acreage and the water licence quantity to be matched.

I guess the interesting part of partitioning here, especially to partition off a small subsection – and this falls out of some of the other implications of what we're allowing when we're freeing up an irrigation district to partition off some of their licences. Mr. Speaker, I think everybody in the House is aware that I have access to water through the Lethbridge Northern irrigation district. There are possibilities where if I were to say, "I want my farm partitioned off," because this partition is open to definition, does that give me a separate licence? What freedoms do I have with that licence? Even if we're starting to talk about, you know, partitioning off or setting out a separate licence for some of these other uses, like the nonhousehold use that's defined here, we're in effect transferring to those licence holders a marketable good in the sense that they then will have a fixed licence.

This is another clarification I would ask: if that happens, does it transfer with the priority of the irrigation district licence or does it transfer with a priority of the time of partitioning? Because if you can partition off part of that district, like the water that comes to my farm and my acres, and then I want to sell them to somebody who wants to have access to water, that's quite a capital gain for anybody who would want to sell that licence in the future. You know, how are we dealing with this in the context of value of these partitioned-off licences?

We saw an illustration of the value of water in southern Alberta last year. The prices that were put on water in southern Alberta last year cannot be interpreted as a long-term equilibrium value of water because these were short-term risk management premium-type pricing situations. We saw some individuals transferring their water access agreements from one farmer to another, totally allowable here, and I think the highest price I heard was \$160 an acre, where that acre was eligible to receive eight inches of water. So if you transfer that to an acre-foot basis, you're basically ending up with something around \$240 to \$250 an acre-foot of water. So that in effect really puts a signal into our community and into our discussion about what do we do in the context of a value trade-off here in terms of who has the ownership of that water when it's under a group licence and who should the benefits of that accrue back to.

That, Mr. Speaker, is way beyond the intent of this amendment, but what it does is it kind of raises some issues that we have to start thinking about as we go into the next round of discussions about what is water, what is water worth, what's quality of water, what's ownership of water, what's transferability of water? You know, as the Minister of Environment has said, what about interbasin transfers? What about new storage facilities? So all of these kinds of things. As we get into that debate, we should be looking at the context of: when we change legislation, are we creating wealth for someone that we didn't intend to directly with that legislation?

4:00

In the context of the 1995 Water Act I think the debate at that time when we traveled the province listening to Albertans speak about water and the importance of water to them – they said that they saw

water as a public good. We have to then start questioning whether or not amendments to subsequent acts or supporting acts, such as the irrigation act, that deals with both the access to the ownership of and the delegation of use permits – Mr. Speaker, I go back and I erase the words “ownership of,” because there’s no such thing in the context of these licences in an irrigation district as individual ownership by a farmer. It’s a right to access agreement more than it is an ownership. So I’ll let that explanation be what I mean by the word “ownership” when I used it at that point. It’s right to access, and what they’re doing is transferring these rights to access the water as opposed to transferring ownership of it.

We have to start thinking about this in a much broader context. If we are providing individuals in the province through licences, through agreements, through legislation with the ability to in effect create a new concept of property, that concept of property being a piece of paper which gives them access to water, we as a public should be really seriously looking at how we want to deal with the relationship between that access piece of paper and our concept of the ownership of water, which under that 1995 act was deemed to be a public good.

So I guess in the context of where we go with this kind of legislation, I think that those comments I’ve just made, Mr. Speaker, are intended to kind of trail off into the future, not specifically to be something we need to deal with in the context of this act, unless we want to start saying: okay; if these transfers occur within a district, then some recognition of the wealth creation by that transfer should be noted. We should be then deciding who has access to or who is the recipient of that payment in the context of wealth.

I know that in the preceding summer, last year, when farmers were transferring their water access agreements, what we in effect had was the farmer saying, “You can have my water,” and as a trade-off they took a lower income, because, you know, their land was then either being summer fallowed or it was being used at a lower productivity level. So it wasn’t really just a sale of an asset type thing or an access agreement, but it was a trade-off of income. We have to look at that in the context of how we judge what is the fair value of those agreements that developed last summer.

This gives us a sense of how important water is to Albertans, especially to the agriculture community in southern Alberta. We saw that value put on it last year in the context of farmers with investments associated with certain styles of farming, certain crops that they were producing. Rather than idle all of that investment, they were willing to go out and purchase the access to water from other farmers. Again, as I said, that’s a short-run decision, so we can’t take that value as something that we could deal with in terms of capitalizing long-term present value. The very fact that farmers were willing to make those kinds of trades indicates that this is a discussion that needs to be held.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, I had a chance – I think it must be about a month or six weeks ago now – to attend a public meeting in southern Alberta where the South Saskatchewan River basin was dealing with their first public meeting. This is a possibility of a plan. They were presenting their river basin management plan, which all river basins have to do now under the 1995 Water Act. It was interesting because almost the whole focus of that meeting in the context of how they were going to deal with water management within the district focused on: how do they in effect create property rights for water; how do they create transfer mechanisms for that defined property right? This sends a message that in an area where water is scarce, we have to be very cognizant of any type of change we make in legislation that affects the value of water for the users of that water.

If we look at some of the issues that they were raising, it was all

associated with, you know, if the public puts a high enough value on water for a particular use, they will be willing to come up with the actual dollars that are necessary to encourage a transfer of use access. In other words, if you want water for in-stream maintenance, if you want water for an urban use, if you want water for minimum flows, if you want water for an ecosystem support system, if you can’t bid it away from other users, then the community as such doesn’t feel strongly enough about that particular use of water that you come up with the cash that’s necessary to buy it.

So, you know, that was an interesting perception, because when we went through the debate on the 1995 Water Act, a lot of the discussion that went on about these river basin management plans was focused on basically sufficiency of water, whether or not the stream flow management plans, the management of the flow through on dams were adequate. This was all the kind of discussion that went on at the time, and very little of the discussion in 1995 was associated with pricing transfer mechanisms. Whereas now all of a sudden as we get into making this actually work, we’ve turned to a situation of marketizing water within these river basins, creating a pseudomarket or in fact a functional market for water as a commodity. I guess the thing that I again go back to is that in the context of some of the things we’re dealing with here in terms of the ease with which we’re facilitating partitioning of small amounts of water, those small amounts still will have a value. We need to look at the consequences of what we’re doing in the future as we look at how we want to manage water across our province.

I know a lot of these issues will be addressed by the undertaking that the Minister of Environment initiated last week, but this is where we have to start looking: what is water, what does it mean when we start talking about transfers of water, and what does it mean both to the recipient community and to the community both in the short and the long run when you end up with water being diverted out of that community?

I guess in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would hope that just because this is a set of amendments that are initiated by the irrigation districts, by the users of water and that this act in effect is internal to the operation of these irrigation districts rather than the large body of water policy across Alberta – other than the one issue that I raised and would hope to have clarification on in committee, I would hope that everybody at this stage would support this, because it does reduce administrative burden and promotes timeliness when decisions have to be made. So I hope that everyone in the Legislature finds this bill to their liking and will support the irrigation districts in their requests.

4:10

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to rise today very briefly to support the amendments proposed to the Irrigation Districts Act. [some applause] The kiddies are playing, you know; they really are. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I don’t have any control over these people. [interjections] Until they want to speak in the next caucus meeting.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, this legislation will benefit a number of my constituents who rely heavily on access to water delivered by the irrigation districts. My colleague from Little Bow prefaced his comments about the value of irrigation, and I’d like to echo his sentiments and add a few of my own.

In my riding, where the Western irrigation district operates, it is readily apparent that an irrigation district does much more than just deliver water to irrigation farmers. Yes, irrigation by itself, just for

farmers, is incredibly important. There are 1.3 million acres of crops grown within the province's 13 irrigation districts, and that's everything from barley and beans to potatoes and sugar beets. But there are many rural residents and other users of small volumes of water that rely solely on irrigation districts for their water supply. Irrigation provides domestic water to nearly 50 communities, several of them in my area. It means economic strength, and our provincial irrigation infrastructure supports 3,200 jobs in the agricultural processing sector and 680 jobs in the manufacturing of agricultural and other machinery.

We know that population growth in centres close to irrigation development is higher than the normal provincial average. In fact, more than half of the rural water users in southern Alberta depend on irrigation for all of their water needs, from drinking to fire protection. Recreation and wildlife habitat projects also benefit from the availability of water in these dry areas of southern Alberta, and it is imperative that we continue to serve these types of projects. However, many of my colleagues here today have enjoyed the benefits of Chestermere Lake without even realizing that it was not a lake at all but rather an irrigation reservoir owned and operated by the Western irrigation district and made available to all of us to use.

I have to tell you that it's not always an easy ride between Chestermere and the Western irrigation district, but it has smoothed out a lot in the last few years on the fight over the level of the lake and how much everybody is going to pay. It has improved, and I'm very grateful for that.

Irrigation has delivered water to wetlands as well, which helped reverse the declining population of some of our threatened and endangered species. As an example of that, in Alberta there are four different irrigation districts that have received the coveted blue heron award, given by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. It's a co-operative international program that covers the United States, Canada, and Mexico. In the case of the Western irrigation district there are about 50 Ducks Unlimited projects. Thirty of them are part of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Those projects contain approximately 65,000 breeding pairs of ducks and 2,000 pairs of geese. The area comprises about 10,000 acres of wetland projects and upland nesting sites.

Healthy wetlands improve wildfowl seasonal movement, and irrigation in Alberta feeds about 80 different bodies of water, amounting to more than 300 square miles of water surface and more than 1,000 miles of shoreline. You know, you just have to think about the impact not only on the birds, fish, and animals but on the people that can enjoy having access to water that way as well in a dry part of this province.

The amendments proposed in this legislation are important to all end users even though the total amount of water supplied to them is minimal. Ask a hamlet about water for fire protection or talk to an acreage owner who needs water for their shelterbelt or their horses or visit a small livestock operation that needs water for their cattle, and you'll soon see the value to them of having an irrigation district in their area.

Mr. Speaker, we aren't changing the intent of the legislation that we passed in 1999. In fact, we are strengthening the spirit of the Irrigation Districts Act after working with it for the last two years. These amendments are empowering; that is, they allow each district to deliver water to users in their area and to do so in a manner that meets the needs of that particular region. Remember, we are talking about small-volume users here only. Major water users like large industry or a large livestock operation would still need to obtain their own separate water licence under the Water Act. That's a necessity, and we are not changing those rules.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate my support for these

amendments on behalf of all Albertans who are served by irrigation districts but especially on behalf of my constituents, who know and appreciate the advantage that it affords them. Thank you.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View? Anybody else wishing to speak on this bill?

The hon. Member for Little Bow to close the debate?

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Bill 4

Public Health Amendment Act, 2002

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

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of Bill 4, the Public Health Amendment Act, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at new models for delivering health services and how to make the best and most appropriate use of a limited health workforce, we need to reconsider the role of registered nurses. Responding to requests from the Calgary and Capital health regions and the council of health region CEOs, I'm pleased to propose the Public Health Amendment Act to provide greater flexibility in how registered nurses are employed to provide extended health services in Alberta.

First, Mr. Speaker, the proposed legislation formally recognizes and creates the title of nurse practitioner for the highly skilled registered nurses who provide extended health services. Also, under the current legislation a registered nurse who provides extended health services must be employed by a regional health authority, a provincial health board, or the Department of Health and Wellness. The intent was to make sure that nurses had the support services that they need to practise safely. The Public Health Amendment Act achieves the same purpose by legislating not who may employ a nurse but the criteria that any employer must meet in providing appropriate supports to its nurses.

A further amendment provides authority to make regulations on additional training, experience, or conditions of employment. Alberta Health and Wellness is consulting on amendments to the regulations that will include employment criteria like linking nurse practitioners to laboratory and radiology services, public health referral networks, pharmacy services, and other resources.

Mr. Speaker, the support of this House for the Public Health Amendment Act also supports an expanded and more flexible role for nurse practitioners in delivering quality services as part of a more sustainable public health care system.

That concludes my remarks, sir.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In case the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness thinks that we don't believe he does anything right, today we're going to endorse this initiative. I can see that he's delighted.

Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that there is constant room for improvement in the health care system, and one of the ways that's widely accepted for achieving that improvement is to allow more flexibility for some of the highly trained people who work in the health care system to fully utilize their knowledge and expertise. So that's the reason that we will be voting for this bill.

Besides the change in definition the main change that the bill introduces is moving or altering restrictions on who can employ nurse practitioners under the act, moving it out of the act and into regulations. Moving the requirement out of the act and into regulations of course can be seen as operating in two ways. We do recommend in our own discussion paper on health care, called Making Medicare Better, that the government act quickly to ensure that all health care professionals can fully utilize their training and expertise. I think we would probably all agree, including people in the profession, that in Alberta we have not always been making the best possible use of our medical professionals. So I think these amendments as proposed under this legislation can be seen as a positive way of allowing more flexible work arrangements for nurse practitioners and better use of multidisciplinary teams of health professionals. Up until now nurse practitioners have only been able to work in areas designated as underserved by Alberta Health. Proposed changes to the regulations could help ensure that nurse practitioners are better utilized. According to some government documents we've obtained, the proposed changes to the regulations will allow other organizations such as nonprofit community groups to directly engage nurse practitioners.

4:20

Of course, my comments would not be complete if I didn't express a few reservations. We are always leery of control being shifted out of legislation and into regulations. We are concerned that the public, through the full legislative process, needs as much opportunity as possible to see how health care policy is being developed and what all the issues are, and probably the most effective single vehicle for providing the public with that opportunity is the Legislature itself. As material or as issues are moved from legislation into regulation, the accountability to this House is diminished and the transparency for the public is also diminished. The devil, of course, is in the details in this process, and those details will be in the regulations, which are not, I might note, before us now. I would encourage the government to return to historically common practices of many years ago of introducing regulations in tandem with the legislation so that a full debate can be undertaken.

I think that with those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat and endorse the legislation on behalf of the entire caucus.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Edmonton-Riverview for his endorsement and gracious comments and now call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

Bill 5 Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act

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

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General for Alberta it is my pleasure to address the Legislature today and support second reading of Bill 5, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act.

The Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act, or the ISO Act, as I will refer to it, is a welcome piece of legislation because it will allow spousal and child maintenance orders to be obtained, varied, and enforced more efficiently when the parties reside in different Canadian jurisdictions. This will benefit many Albertans, including children, parents, former spouses, and former common-law spouses.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Hon. member, since you are the sponsor of the bill, you will need to move second reading of this bill.

MR. RATHGEBER: Mr. Speaker, I move second reading of Bill 5, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, in June of 1998 the MLA review of the maintenance enforcement program and child access, chaired by the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, presented its excellent report on ways that maintenance enforcement could be improved. Recommendation 36 suggested that the province "seek more cooperative measures nationally" to reduce delays and alleviate other difficulties associated with the reciprocal enforcement of maintenance orders. It is hoped that the proposed Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act will successfully meet this recommendation by making reciprocal enforcement less complicated and less time consuming.

Every province and territory has been working towards passing similar ISO acts so that it is easier for individuals who are entitled to support under provincial or territorial legislation to receive their benefits in a timely manner. It is my understanding that Manitoba and the Yukon Territory have already passed their respective ISO acts and that Ontario has introduced its version. A model ISO act was developed by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Family Law Committee and drafted by Alberta's own Legislative Counsel. At their conference in August 2001 Canada's Premiers reviewed the model act and expressed their commitment to pass their respective version within one year.

Mr. Speaker, the ISO Act will replace and significantly streamline current procedures under the Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders Act, or the REMO Act, as it is known. Under REMO a person claiming support from an individual in a different Canadian province or territory must first bring a court application in his or her own jurisdiction. For example, a mother raising children in Alberta would have to attend court in Alberta in order to make an application for child support from the father who happened to reside in Ontario. At the hearing the Alberta court may only grant what is called a provisional order, or one that is enforceable until it is confirmed by a court in Ontario at a second court hearing.

Not only does the mother have to incur the time and the expense of a court application in Alberta, but the father in Ontario must also attend a second court hearing in that province. The two-hearing process under the REMO Act is also required, for example, when a father residing in Alberta finds that his financial means have significantly been reduced so that he would like to decrease the amount of support that he currently pays. If the recipient of support lives, for example, in British Columbia, there must be first a provisional hearing in Alberta and then a confirmation hearing in B.C. The time that it takes for both jurisdictions to hold court hearings can create considerable delay in obtaining an enforceable support order or changing an existing one. In fact, this complex process can take up to two years in many instances.

AN HON. MEMBER: How long?

MR. RATHGEBER: Two years in many instances.

Like other Canadian provinces and territories Alberta has recognized the need to change and improve procedures for obtaining and varying support between jurisdictions. Mr. Speaker, under the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act only one court hearing will be required in almost all cases. An Albertan claiming support or applying to increase or decrease the amount of support payable under an existing order will only need to complete a paper application rather than attend court.

This paper support application or support variation application, as

the case may be, will set out what the person is requesting, such as an original amount of support, a new amount of support, whether higher or lower or none at all, or an amount of support arrears to be canceled. The paper application will also contain a copy of the statutory or other legal authority relied upon, the party's financial circumstances if relevant, and the other party's financial circumstances to the extent which they are known. All of the evidence in the application will be sworn so that it is reliable. An individual will be able to submit his or her paper application at their nearest courthouse. The application will then be forwarded to the other party's province or territory for a single court hearing held there.

An Albertan will only have to attend court if he or she is the respondent to a paper application started by somebody in another jurisdiction. An Albertan responding to an application will receive notice of the hearing from their nearest court. He or she will be able to attend this hearing to present evidence, at which time the court will also consider the sworn evidence that the applicant in the other province or territory included in their paper application. In this way the ISO Act protects the right of both parties to have their point of view heard.

If the court requires further information from the person in the other jurisdiction in order to make its decision, it will be able to request this information through the courthouse where that person submitted the paper application. Once it has considered all of the evidence from both parties, the court will be in a better position to grant an order that may be acted upon or enforced immediately. There will no longer be delays because a second hearing was required or another court must confirm the order before it becomes enforceable. This will be of great benefit to many Albertans, especially those who rely on court-ordered support payments for their quality of life.

4:30

I should point out, Mr. Speaker, that two court hearings may still be required in a few varied cases, as the ISO Act will only apply to support applications brought under provincial or territorial legislation such as our Domestic Relations Act or the Alberta Parentage and Maintenance Act. When parties residing in different jurisdictions are involved in divorce proceedings under the federal Divorce Act, they will still have to obtain or vary their court orders in accordance with the provision of that federal legislation. Unless parties involved in a variation application agree to have their application in a particular province or territory, the Divorce Act currently requires a court hearing in both of their jurisdictions using the provisional and confirmation order process which I described earlier. Two court hearings may also be required under the ISO Act if one of the parties resides in a reciprocating country that still uses the two-hearing procedure. However, most of the states that Alberta reciprocates with in the matters of spousal and child support have already moved toward the single-hearing process. The United States and all other Canadian provinces and territories will be using the new one-step court hearing process along with Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act will only make it easier for parties in different Canadian jurisdictions to obtain or vary a maintenance order. It will also make it easier for support recipients to enforce a court order if the person required to pay lives in a different province or territory in Canada or if one of the parties moves to a different province or territory.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, the 1998 MLA review of the maintenance enforcement program and child access found that many Albertans were

concerned about their ability to enforce a court order when they or the other party moved out of Alberta. Enforcement between Canadian jurisdictions will be more efficient under the ISO Act because there will no longer be a 30-day waiting period when Alberta receives an order from another province or territory to send one of its orders to another province or territory with a request for enforcement.

In contrast to the current REMO Act, Mr. Speaker, the ISO Act will make all maintenance orders granted in Canada immediately recognizable by another province or territory. This is because all of the Canadian provinces and territories have substantially similar legislation entitling individuals to support. However, where a support order is granted in a reciprocating jurisdiction outside Canada and one of the parties wishes to enforce it in Canada, the other party will still have 30 days to apply to the court to set the order aside as improperly obtained.

Mr. Speaker, there are other significant features of the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act that will help Albertans obtain the child or spousal support they are entitled to or make it easier for Albertans required to pay support to understand and respond to court orders. There will be alternatives regarding which jurisdiction's law applies so that individuals, especially children, are more likely to be granted the support they deserve. For example, if the law of the place where the children reside does not give them entitlement to support, the law of the jurisdiction hearing the application will apply. Courts will continue to provide written reasons if they refuse to grant support, if they refuse to increase or decrease the amount payable under an existing order, or if they decide to set aside a support order. This is to increase the parties' understanding of a decision that may not be favourable to them.

Mr. Speaker, there will be longer appeal periods so that the parties have sufficient time to bring an appeal given the time it takes to transfer documents between jurisdictions. The Ministry of Human Resources and Employment will continue to have the ability to bring or to respond to support applications on behalf of Albertans receiving social assistance even when the other party resides outside of Alberta.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act will significantly benefit Albertans including the recipients of spousal or child support, the individuals required to pay said support, and others. In most situations where parties reside in different jurisdictions, the streamlined procedures under the ISO Act will remove the need for two court hearings. This will make support applications less lengthy and complicated, reducing legal costs for the parties involved and the court costs borne by Alberta taxpayers. Perhaps more importantly, the new reciprocal process will enable support beneficiaries, particularly children who rely on maintenance for their standard of living, to receive the amounts they deserve in a more efficient and time-effective manner. Improvements in obtaining and enforcing support orders are particularly warranted today given the increased mobility of Canadians between provinces and territories. Finally, by passing the ISO Act, Alberta will meet its commitment to assist in the co-ordination and harmonization of reciprocal support legislation throughout the dominion of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have been given the opportunity to present Bill 5, the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act. Our government is confident that Albertans addressing matters of spousal and child support that involve other jurisdictions will greatly appreciate the improvements that the Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act provides to them.

I encourage all hon. members to support Bill 5 at second reading.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to be able to have the opportunity to address the debate on Bill 5, Interjurisdictional Support Orders Act, in second reading.

Maintenance enforcement and issues arising out of maintenance enforcement I've been told is the area where MLA offices get the most calls and the calls that are most difficult to deal with. I can certainly believe that. I've been working on this issue since 1998, and it is an issue that strikes very close to people's hearts and to people's pocketbooks. I think what we have to continue to remind each other is that, bottom line, we are talking about support for children. That's what makes the concept of the maintenance enforcement program so important, because it's easy to get distracted by the adversarial nature of divorce or of separation between common-law partners, but what we're really talking about here is securing financial support for children.

The truth is that there are very few alimony orders that are granted by the courts anymore. There's an assumption that women are able to get out and earn their own money, to resume a career or start a career. We just don't get alimony orders being made anymore, so really probably 98 percent of what we're talking about here is maintenance orders for children.

We all know, I hope for MLAs trying to assist their constituents from their constituency offices, how difficult it is to try and track down a reciprocal maintenance order from another province or, worse, a foreign maintenance order. So I am supportive of what the government is attempting to do here, not particularly because it's this government but because it's an initiative from across Canada, where all the provinces and territories are trying to align themselves with identical or very similar legislation so that we can have fairly seamless transference. As the Member for Edmonton-Calder pointed out, we've always prided ourselves in Canada on our mobility rights and that we have an increasingly mobile population. Indeed, as we are in a global marketplace, that mobility widens even further. So if we have people that are traveling and living all over the world that we are trying to either seek support from or get support to, it's important that we're able to do that with the least number of restrictions placed in front of us as possible.

Certainly what's come up in a lot of the work that I have done is the issue of what I'll call access to justice. I think it gets very frustrating when one party is able to continually draw another party into court for a variance, for a provisional order, for a change in a support order, for a new order, for whatever. The other party has to constantly go to court to answer this. We'll see whether this is successful in what we're trying to do here, and maybe we can transfer that to some of the work that we're doing in the province, because ultimately we are trying to achieve a fair balance here. We need to have a system that works as well as possible so that we cannot inconvenience people too much and still achieve getting that financial support for children.

4:40

By the way, I was shocked and surprised at how thorough the Member for Edmonton-Calder was in walking through exactly what is contained in this legislation. I can believe that his writer was up all night writing that speech for him, and he delivered it very nicely. There was a good deal of information in there. I think that is very helpful, as we have more and more people that are following our proceedings through the on-line *Hansard* or the live audio. I think it's helpful to have that kind of very clear description laid out here in the Assembly so that others can follow and understand exactly what the legislation is meant to be. So congratulations and a gold star to the Member for Edmonton-Calder.

AN HON. MEMBER: Brent's got a girlfriend.

MS BLAKEMAN: No, no. I don't think we can go that far. But it does save me some work in not having to do it for the same purpose and walk through it all. [interjections] I know; I know. The frat boys. You get them going and, you know, off they go.

A couple of points that I did want to raise around this. It is important that this legislation be aligned as closely as possible with the other legislation that's being proposed. There are a couple of differences that I'll come back to later and put the question forward to the Member for Edmonton-Calder, and perhaps he can answer me at another time or find the answer for me.

I'm assuming here that the designated Alberta authority would be the maintenance enforcement program director, and he can confirm that for me. Now, the authorities are ministerial appointments with the power to delegate and with protection from prosecution for personal liability for acts that are conducted in good faith. There's no provision – and there is provision in the Ontario legislation – that says that the Crown is not relieved of liability. I think in fact what they're trying to say is that they are relieved of liability here in Alberta. So I'm wondering why the province has chosen to deviate from the Ontario legislation in that manner.

Now, there's another issue, and I don't know how we can get around these. They're essentially security issues. I hope that we will continue to seek a way to do this. I understand why the information has to be asked for and given, but I think there are underlying security problems in some cases here. I hope that we can continue to seek a way to get this information and maybe hold it privately where it doesn't jeopardize someone. Specifically I'm talking about the insistence, the right insistence, that home addresses and financial information, particularly from claimants, who are usually the women, have to be given as part of the order. What's happened in my experience with some of these cases is that where there is a particularly acrimonious separation or divorce and one party has been successful in removing himself or herself from the public eye and has managed to stay away from any kind of encounter with the other individual, of course now they have to go to court to get support for their kids and they have to put their home address down on the application form. So, bingo, the spouse gets to know instantly how to get hold of them, and there's a real personal security issue there. I understand why you have to give a home address – it's only fair – but there is a personal security issue there that we have not been able to figure out a way to deal with and successfully surmount the problem.

The same thing with the financial information. Again, it's only fair when you're talking about support amounts and you're talking about how this is all going to be figured out and who pays what and when and all of that. Yes, clearly to be fair and to have a balance, both parties have to be given their financial information. But, once again, there is a clear possibility that that can be taken advantage of when you have that kind of detailed financial information like where your bank is, how many bank accounts you have, what's in them, and what cheques you've written. It's not difficult for someone to follow that through and get very detailed personal information and use it to track somebody down and cause personal harm to them. You know, on the one hand, in this province we've made some attempts to address the issue of family violence or domestic violence or violence against women, whatever you want to call it. There's more that we could be doing, and this is an area where it's a definite loophole. There's a legal reason for it, but there's a definite loophole here that I'd like to see us continue to attempt to find a solution for.

Another one of the questions I had is that there is no required process for the designated authority. The designated authority does serve the respondents in accordance with the regulations, but it's not

clear when the support application will be forwarded to the courts and under what circumstances, and this again differs from the Ontario legislation. So why isn't the process the same as that for the registration and enforcement of orders made outside of Alberta? Are the Alberta courts aware of this? How, specifically, are the designated authorities going to serve the respondents here?

In Ontario when an out-of-province order arrives, it goes to the designated authority who is a clerk of the court, and here, as I asked you in the very beginning, I ask you to confirm whether the designated authority was the director of maintenance enforcement. In Ontario that designated authority is a clerk of the court, and then of course you're already in the court system, so when you have an order to appear, it's coming from the courts. We're not going that route, so why aren't we going that route? Why did Alberta make a different choice there? We're joining Manitoba and the Yukon in not using the courts. I thought the whole purpose of this was that we were all going to align and paddle our canoes in the same direction, and we've got some that are doing it one way and some that are doing it another way, so if I could get that question answered as well.

In Alberta the courts must give reasons for refusing to make a support order, but other jurisdictions require written reasons and delivery of these reasons to the appropriate authority. We don't seem to be saying that, so how come?

If I can just take a step back for a moment and look at the whole concept behind the foreign orders. When I've dealt with this, the big frustration has been the small number of other sovereign countries that we the province of Alberta have actually negotiated a reciprocal agreement with. As I said, as we move more and more into a global economy where we potentially could have borderless countries and people moving around – well, look at the European Community. You've essentially taken the borders of those countries away, and with one passport you're moving through all of them, and I think it won't be very long until we could have a time when people are easily moving around different countries in the world. Well, it's great if they can move around, but if we're trying to chase them down to get a reciprocal order happening, that's very difficult. So my encouragement here is that there be a commitment on behalf of the government to continue to work on setting up reciprocal agreements with other countries. One I'm thinking of quite specifically, that I've worked on, is Holland, and we don't have a reciprocal agreement with them and we need to. It comes to our attention because we have a claimant in Alberta. So that's money for kids that are living in Alberta that we're not being successful in being able to get hold of and making sure that our kids get that support money. That's not specifically addressed in this legislation. It's a bit of a tangent, but it's worth my going on it, I think.

4:50

Oh, miscellaneous points. There's no definition for child, which is really interesting. Generally there's a lot of tradition and precedents around when you no longer have to pay support because the child is no longer a child; they're an adult. Just to clarify then. Usually you would be paying maintenance until the child has reached 18, at which time they have achieved an age of majority. In other words, they're an adult. You're not paying maintenance anymore, unless – and this is the exception provision – they are attending a postsecondary institution and living at home with one of the parents. Then essentially they're a dependent adult while they are pursuing that postsecondary education and still are eligible to receive that support from the other parent. Here we are not defining child. So that strikes me as a rather glaring omission.

There are a number of other ones that are omitted as well. Certified is not defined. Clerk is not defined. Regulations are not defined. Oh, what a surprise in Alberta.

Alberta courts will be allowed to impute income in provisional

orders. I'm wondering why this is specifically included in the legislation. Now, I think this is a good idea, but I know I'm going to be hearing from people that are wondering why it's in there. So why was that choice made? I'm assuming that it's flowing from the excellent work done by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed, from her maintenance enforcement review in '98, but I'd be interested specifically in why that's being included here.

Here's another one. Why was it chosen to use the term "as soon as practicable" instead of "promptly" when you're referring to the review and forwarding of applications? It's a small difference but an important one if you're waiting for something to happen there and if you're trying to get a grasp of what a reasonable time line is. They're obviously legal beagle terms, but the sponsor of the bill is a lawyer, it's my understanding, so perhaps he'd like to tell me why those choices were made.

Also, our legislation is referring to sworn documents as opposed to affidavits. Is that for more generalized understanding? Again, why was that choice made?

The 18-month expiry period for the support applications in the courts. I've already been asked a question about that, and how was that 18 months arrived at? How did you pick that one? Was it just sort of out of a hat, or was there some reasoning behind that about why it would be 18 months? Did it perhaps come from one of the other jurisdictions, or was it the experience of the courts here in Alberta? Why?

I'm very pleased to see any movement forward on the whole issue of maintenance and maintenance enforcement and support. I think it's important that whenever we work on this issue, we look to instill a balance to ensure that there's equity and fairness in the way both parties are treated here. I believe that I see that in this legislation that's being put forward, but I do have some questions that I would like answered. Until that point I can't give it unqualified support, but I'm certainly willing to speak on behalf of my colleagues at this point and say that we're interested in having the questions I've raised answered and we are looking upon this bill with favour. Hopefully I'll be able to give it unqualified support in another stage of readings.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this.

MR. STEVENS: Mr. Speaker, I move that we adjourn the debate on this bill.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 8

Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2002

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Finance to move second reading of Bill 8, that being the Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act, 2002.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity make some comments about Bill 8 and the supplementary estimates. The supplementary estimates are traditionally used as an opportunity for further grants to an existing service in addition to the sum already appropriated, to extend a service that the government already has in place, for a new expenditure on behalf of

a newly enacted statute – so if there has been a change in legislation and there's need for financing that change, then it has often been done through supplementary estimates – to meet the cost created by an unexpected emergency. Again, we've seen those requests before the House in the past. They're also used to transfer money from one vote to another in the budget, and they've also been used to extend the purposes of a vote. So they have a variety of uses, and that's the case in the bill before us this afternoon.

I'm interested in the appropriation for Children's Services. The information that we have in the bill is that the reason for that particular item being there is a result of the dispute with teachers and the removal of services from schools. The sum that is in the bill is fairly considerable, \$500,000, so it would be interesting to know exactly what the details of that expenditure are.

I assume without further information, Mr. Speaker, that it must be concerned with providing services to children and to the parents of children who found themselves with youngsters out of school and having to provide care for those youngsters. So I would appreciate hearing from the government in terms of what needs exactly are going to be met with this sum. Are they day care costs? Are they tutoring costs? Are they costs that could of course have been avoided if the government had acted earlier to resolve the dispute with teachers? There were some suggestions from this side of the House how that could've been done going back as far as last April.

It's interesting that there would be a group of costs selected out to be paid for, for instance, under the Children's Services budget, but there were a number of others who also had losses and who had to cover costs including parents and teachers and small businesses. The withdrawal of those services had wide-reaching effects on people, so I think the government owes the House some further explanation as to exactly how those dollars in Children's Services are being expended.

5:00

One of the other concerns we have as an opposition is requests like this coming forward – and it seems it happens session after

session – without any sort of long-term plan in terms of financing that would somehow or other accommodate these out-of-budget expenditures. Now, I think we all realize that it's impossible to predict everything that could happen, but the kinds of requests that we've had in the past for funds to be set aside for emergencies I think bear even closer scrutiny and consideration by the government because of the kind of history we've had with the number of these requests that come forward.

So I have those questions about Children's Services. There are similar questions about each of the departments, Mr. Speaker, and I know some of my colleagues have some questions about those specific departments. So with those questions and comments I'd conclude. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been another excellent day in the House, and I want to thank you for your stewardship in that regard, which at this hour of the day leads me to say the following: I'm going to move that we call it 5:30 and then adjourn until 8 tonight. The reason that I would seek the Assembly's concurrence in this is because, as we all know, our Muslim community friends have been invited by the Speaker to a very special celebration in honour of their festival Eid Al-Adha, which will take place in our rotunda in a few minutes' time. I am sure all members will join me in extending our sincere congratulations to all members of our Muslim community, and I hope you will all be able to join me there.

With that, I move that we do call it 5:30 and adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:03 p.m.]

