

## Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Tuesday, March 19, 2002**

**1:30 p.m.**

Date: 2002/03/19

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon.

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

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Visitors**

MS DeLONG: Mr. Speaker, I rise with great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly a very familiar face. This is not only a constituent of Calgary-Bow, but this is the former MLA for Calgary-Bow, Bonnie Laing. This very dear lady very ably represented Calgary-Bow for many years, and she also contributed to the well-being of all Albertans: through seniors, through treatments for addictions, and especially for the homeless. If Bonnie would please rise in the Speaker's gallery.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this House 32 bright and curious grade 6 students from River Glen school in Red Deer. These students and their teachers are represented by myself because their school is in the constituency of Red Deer-North, but the majority of these students live in the county of Red Deer and are represented by the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Their teachers are Mrs. Dempsey, Miss Thomas, and Mrs. Pozzolo. Their parent helpers are Mrs. Vincent and Mrs. Courte. I would now ask these well-behaved young students to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two constituents of mine, Charlie and Janice Moore. Charlie usually likes to introduce himself to the people as the old hillbilly from Pine Lake, but I would like to tell you that Charlie is anything but and is very active in our community. Charlie is the president of the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies, a director of the Crossroads Gas Co-op, president of the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake Constituency Association, a past-president of the Crossroads Ag Society, and a current member of numerous other boards. Charlie and his wife, Janice, have a grain farm, and Janice has a cow herd. Charlie has always said: never take on any more work than your wife can handle. Janice does a great job of looking after the farm and the cattle. Charlie and Janice are very good neighbours and very good friends of mine. I would like to ask Charlie and Janice to stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you what might seem like a bit of a shock but a

lifelong friend of mine. We went through grade school and high school. We went to university in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, where the Hon. Guy Boutilier, Minister of Municipal Affairs, also attended. I see that my friend is here today. I'd ask him to rise, and thanks for being my friend. Phil Markovich, please accept the welcome of this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce to you and to the members of the Assembly some 19 people from the property and supply management division, realty services branch of Alberta Infrastructure. These people do a tremendous job for the people of Alberta in the areas of maintenance in government-owned properties, the procurement and sale of surplus supplies, and real estate services. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would now ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Revenue.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with great pleasure that I am able to rise today and introduce a constituent of Calgary-North West who has become a very dear friend over these past few years. In the last year he has also been working in my constituency office three days a week. I'd like to ask Don Severs if he'd please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lest we think there's a conspiracy going on today, another good friend has joined us in the gallery – two of them – so that makes all of them. I would like my good friend Mike Magathan to rise and please enjoy the warm welcome of this House.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you a group of social work students from Grant MacEwan College. They are, I think, outstanding students who are about to set out on a career of helping people in this province. They've taken a tour of the Legislature and are in the gallery observing the proceedings of the House. They are accompanied by their instructor, Ms Kathaleen Quinn, and I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

### Children's Services Funding

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Official Opposition tabled a letter from the executive director of Hull Child and Family Services. This letter informs the parents of a special-needs child that all support for their child is being withdrawn due to cost containment measures. My question is to the Minister of Children's Services. Since last fall's budget cuts how many letters like this have left families with vulnerable children high and dry?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, first of all, there are no children in this province that are high and dry. There is \$55 million for handicapped children's services in Hull homes. There are a number of realignments, redistribution of contracts and agencies so that we can

identify children with special needs and get them help with the right provider.

Mr. Speaker, not two weeks ago I met with some of the children in Calgary with special needs from the Alberta children and youth network. We reviewed some of the issues they had either with the care they were being provided with or with other circumstances that evolved to bring them to the attention of child welfare in the first place. We are following up on every single case, examining every single placement, every single contact the child has had and doing our very best to follow through on every single item for children who have had needs, who have expressed those needs directly to me, and we have made a commitment to follow up on each and every one of those.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second question to the same minister: how can parents appeal these decisions given that Bill 9 will make this appeal process subservient to the minister's cost containment policy?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, such nonsense we're listening to this afternoon. Such nonsense. Right at the very beginning when we introduced Bill 9, the Bill 9 provisions are so that we provide a policy framework. We've given that understanding to all of the authorities, all of those people who are receiving children's services through handicapped children's services. In any kind of situation where there hasn't been policy, the panel itself is asked for some framework and some policy so that they are not all over the map in what they may or may not do.

Mr. Speaker, further, we have actually had people come to the Child Welfare Appeal Panel for very minuscule kinds of things that could be better delegated to supervisors or social workers on the front line, and it's time for that to stop. Simply put, it keeps people waiting too long. It keeps the process in a delay mode.

1:40

So, Mr. Speaker, there are needs for policy. We are working this year with those people that have children's needs in handicapped children's services. We've got an IBI review panel that has been structured to work on how the policy framework works for intensive behaviour intervention as well as some assessments of the Renfrew school and other handicapped children's services needs. So all of those policies will be in place, and no longer will parents be out there wondering how those things happen for them.

If I may, there are 85 cases that went to the Child Welfare Appeal Panel that received a total of \$3.5 million of extra services beyond what their director had assigned. We have no intent to take those services away. They are currently in place. They will stay in place as long as those children need the service.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. I just heard you say, Madam Minister, that you were providing a process to make sure that they didn't get services from your ministry that could be available other places. Why is it that you don't advise them of those other sources of funding for their needs instead of dealing with it by just cutting them off?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to look at a child and anticipate what their needs are and who should deliver that service. Throughout our service delivery system, some are delivered

through Health and Wellness, some are delivered through Learning, and some are obviously services delivered through Children's Services. Sometimes the stacking effect, if we weren't all co-ordinating our effort, could see a child seeing providers from each of the different ministries. So part of this is a matter of co-ordination, but in this review we have members of each of the ministry staffs that will sit on the review and make a determination of the appropriate policy.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: is it government policy to shortchange children now only to pay for it later, when the costs of providing them with service get higher?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, when we had the cost containment measures last year, when we made reductions of 1 percent – let me go back to that \$647 million. We had reduced about \$6.7 million. We had then a certain amount of money that came back, \$4 million from the federal funding for children who needed additional supports, predominantly aboriginal children. We also received some revenue from the national children's benefit, another 1 and a half million dollars. There have not been the significant, draconian cuts that the opposition would have you believe in Children's Services. We have had some notices that we're going to do things differently, contracts that will be managed differently, different kinds of service delivery systems, but in total the bottom line is that the cost containments are furthest away from the child, and we are working very hard to make sure that no child at risk is in fact placed more at risk by any of the cost containment strategies that have been put in place.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the minister provide us with a clear policy on which services her ministry is cutting from children?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, even if one was not prepared to believe the things that I have been saying for the past several weeks on Children's Services, look at the facts. The throne speech identified that Children's Services would be a ministry that would receive some additional resources or receive at least no resources less than the year before. To the hon. member opposite I would say: wait and see what happens in the budget for Children's Services.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: is removing those services that you've talked about consistent with your policy of trying to make cuts furthest away from the child?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I have not talked about removing services from children. I have been talking about working well with the child and family services authorities to realign service deliveries so we don't have circumstances with overlap in service delivery.

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

#### **Windsong Child and Family Services Authority**

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Caseloads in the Wind-

song children's authority are up 25 percent, and the minister responds by cutting their budget. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Has the minister responded to the hundreds of Canmore citizens who claim budget cuts are hurting their children? Have you talked to those citizens?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, throughout the past few weeks and months we've been working very closely with the Windsong authority. We have been providing additional dollars so that they would not be without resources to continue their child welfare management. Sometime in November, when I met with that authority, they indicated that they had made some severe reductions of the numbers that were on the caseload, and I questioned: how could that be done so quickly? What happened overnight that would enable you to reduce the child welfare caseload? They said that they'd found a number of different ways, so we've been working very closely with them to make sure that those children would not have any impediments in service delivery.

Relative to Canmore, the Canmore people who have been drawing very frequently their concerns to the attention of their MLA from Banff-Cochrane have been focusing on the outreach worker position that has been part of what we have funded within the school in Canmore, pointing out the importance of this worker in the child welfare delivery system. Mr. Speaker, we continue to work within that authority and with that school authority to, hopefully, at some point be able to come up with a concrete agreement so that midyear these kinds of things don't occur. We did add in fact some additional dollars to the Windsong authority so that they could make some accommodation for worker provision not necessarily through the school that would hopefully bridge the gap.

DR. MASSEY: Again to the same minister: has the minister told Lawrence Grassi middle school in Canmore that the school drug and alcohol counselor and the student outreach worker are unnecessary? Have you told them that?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member opposite makes the assumption that the minister directly relates to the school. In fact, the Windsong authority relates to the school, identifies priorities within their community, within the region, and works very hard to try and provide those services as a priority.

Let's come back to the fundamental reason that we have been faced with cost containment in the first place. That's because we have had a number of youth who are 11 years of age and older who have been, in my view, abandoned by their parents in terms of child welfare delivery and have placed an inordinate strain on this government to provide where parents have failed. Let's be clear. It is certainly a responsibility that the government backs up but one that the parents primarily have.

In terms of the alcohol and drug program, perhaps the hon. minister of health would wish to comment about the work of AADAC in that community.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: how does trying to off-load and download serve children in this region?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're not off-loading and down-loading; we're looking for new partnerships. Again, we'll have an opportunity later today to listen to the budget. I will then be very pleased to table with this Assembly tomorrow some of the very

things that are going on, currently under way, that will continue to help support communities in child welfare delivery.

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

### Midwifery Services

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister of health claims to favour a team approach in modeling all health professions in health care delivery, yet this government is well behind other provinces in the integration of midwifery services into the health system. My questions are to the minister. Why does Alberta continue to relegate highly qualified midwives to the margins through ad hoc funding arrangements and pilot projects?

MR. MAR: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are concerned with the integration of health care professions throughout a number of different professions. Midwifery is one of them. We, of course, have had some successful pilot projects. I look as an example at the midwifery project that was done in the WestView regional health authority, one that many members of this Assembly would be well familiar with. I would say that we have looked at the issue of midwifery. There are 23 midwives in the province of Alberta, not a great number. They do a good job. In order to integrate them more fully into the system, I think that we need to go through the proper process that we've established through the recommendations set out in the Mazankowski report. It's our intention to do that but not just with midwives. All health professions must be evaluated in such a way so that we get the best value out of all our health professions.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the current funding for malpractice insurance for midwives, which will expire on May 1, 2002, be renewed and put on a more stable basis? If not, why not?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that I'm at liberty to speak to matters relating to the budget.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the minister: when can the parents who choose midwifery services for normal childbirth look forward to having this important cost-saving service available in all health regions throughout Alberta?

MR. MAR: The interesting question here, Mr. Speaker – and I don't have a good answer – is: does this save money? We know from research done at the University of British Columbia that when you take a group of low-risk pregnant women, the outcomes for having those women looked after by midwives versus physicians is the same. There's no greater or lesser risk associated with the use of midwives. When it comes to women that are pregnant that are high risk, then it would appear that it would make greater sense to use physicians. The issue as to whether or not the employment of midwives in this area saves money is not one which is entirely clear yet and, of course, one that we would want to investigate further.

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

### Education System Review

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that the Education Services Settlement Act outlines a binding arbitration process to settle the contract dispute between the employees and the employers; namely, the teachers' labour union and the school boards of trustees. We also know that the act includes a commitment to undertake a comprehensive review of Alberta's learning system. More and more of my constituents have expressed interest in this review and want information on the process. My questions today are to the Minister of Learning. What will the review examine?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is absolutely right; it is contained in Bill 12. We are presently looking at the terms of reference for this committee, but it is our anticipation that the committee will be an extremely broad-reaching committee that will look at all elements of the learning system in Alberta. There is no sense in limiting it at all, and indeed we'll look at everything. That's our plan at the moment, and we feel that the answers that will be brought back from this commission will be answers that will be beneficial for the total learning system, which is the reason we're doing it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Who will be involved in this review?

DR. OBERG: Again, Mr. Speaker, we are just in the process of lining it up, but I would anticipate that there will be ample opportunity for teachers, for students, and for parents to have input into this system. We have not decided who is going to sit on it. We have not decided who is going to be in the actual formation. Actually, everyone in Alberta, regardless of their political stripe, will have the ability to have input into this committee. Again, as I mentioned in the first answer, it will be a very broad-reaching committee, dealing with all issues, whether it's pupil/teacher ratio, class size, hours of instruction. Anything will be looked at.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last supplemental question is also to the same minister. When will the results of the review be communicated to Albertans?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, we're looking at attempting to set this review up as soon as possible, and probably we're aiming at around the first part of June. We anticipate that we will have a report back sometime close to the end of the year. Whether it's January or December is difficult to say. Realistically, if there is legislation needed following this report, we would anticipate bringing it in in the spring of next year. I'm not attempting to prejudge this at all, but we do need to be careful. If there is legislation needed, there needs to be time to do it in this House.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

### Children's Services' Staff Bonus

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There have been many serious problems in Children's Services, from a notable lack of policy to

toddlers perhaps being drugged in day care centres to children being left unsupervised in motels to a number of tragic and unnecessary deaths. Service contracts have been cut and staff squeezed to the breaking point. How does the Minister of Children's Services justify paying over \$700,000 in so-called achievement bonuses to managers while frontline staff and services are stretched to the limit and there are so many profound troubles in her department?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I'm hearing the hon. member opposite question whether or not the staff in Children's Services are doing a good job and are worthy of being recognized for doing the jobs that they have been doing. I heard right now somebody challenge that the people that are working so hard for children and caregivers are perhaps not getting remuneration. There have been many things and many challenges faced in Children's Services – I'll guarantee that – but they clearly have been met honestly and directly by people with integrity who have done the very best work on the front lines. The fact that we have children who are fragile is a regrettable thing. When they die, those tragedies affect every one of us in the system. We gather those facts with heavy hearts. But it certainly doesn't deny that the business we're in, doing child protection and working in the best possible way for the advocacy of children, is a difficult job and that the workers and the administrators and, yes, the leaders within our department are deserving of being recognized for the achievements they've made.

DR. TAFT: I'm sure that the minister knows that the bonuses go to managers and CEOs.

Given that over \$18,000 in bonuses went to the Slave Lake region last year, the same region where the Kerrigan twins were in care, how can the minister justify turning on her own workers when she was paying the region bonuses to achieve the results she asked for?

MS EVANS: If there's an oblique reference in the question, Mr. Speaker, to discussing further the cases at Slave Lake and the kinds of things that will be before an arbitration panel right now, I will not be tempted.

DR. TAFT: Well, then, will the minister continue to pay bonuses to authorities where children die unnecessarily in government care?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I've looked very carefully not only at the population increases but at the very tragic deaths of children within our system. As I've said previously, we receive the news about death within the system with a heavy heart. Essentially, there has been on an annual basis no disproportionate increase in the number of children in child protection, in child care, that have met with tragic circumstances. In other words, they are about the same this year as they were in the previous year. Perhaps, then, the hon. member is challenging whether anybody in Children's Services should ever receive a bonus. I'm very confused.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

### Highway Maintenance

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been blessed with a lot of snow lately, especially at Drayton Valley-Calmar, which is great. However, the bane in this blessing comes in the form of snowplowing our primary and secondary highways. My question is to the hon. Minister of Transportation. Can the minister explain who is responsible for the plowing of snow on highways?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ultimate responsibility for removing snow on both secondary and primary highways rests with the Ministry of Transportation. However, the ministry has outsourced the maintenance of our provincial highways, maintenance I would describe as not only snowplowing but also crack filling, weed and grass control along highways, and the replacement of signs that might have to be replaced. The province of Alberta is divided into nine contract management areas. Those contracts hold those companies that won those contracts to the same provisions that we had when the government itself used to snowplow and maintain the highways. Each contract includes a blanket provision to ensure that the snowplows are out there immediately after a snowfall and to monitor, as well, snow removal and ice patches that may result from inclement weather.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental to the same minister: how are these contracts determined? In other words, does the minister take into consideration the amount of equipment, the age of equipment, and the safety of equipment?

2:00

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, as you know, the province is pretty large from north to south and east to west. Yes, there are the same provisions in terms of safety in all of the contracts, but we do know that in certain parts of Alberta there will be more snow, and as a result more equipment is necessary to handle the level of snowfall, generally speaking, historically. However, in some of the areas that have been mentioned before, we have actually had to move even additional equipment, with good co-operation between some of the contractors, to ensure that we do maintain one of the best levels of service possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

REV. ABBOTT: Excellent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the same minister: are counties and MDs allowed to bid on road plowing for the provincial government, and if not, why not?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, all counties and MDs are encouraged to work with the contractors that do have the contracts for snow removal and highway maintenance in the individual contract management areas, and there are examples where various counties have partnered with the contractors to ensure an even better level of service. I'd like to remind the hon. member and, in fact, the Legislative Assembly that outsourcing of highway maintenance has saved the department roughly 20 percent over the last number of years, and all those dollars are reinvested back into the provincial highway system.

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

#### **Absolute Discretionary Trusts**

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In Ontario a legal precedent was created for trusts for the disabled whereby certain assets, say from an estate, would not be considered an asset for the purposes of receiving benefits from the government under any

disability assistance programs. Technically known as absolute discretionary trusts, they are commonly called Henson trusts. The Ontario government worked beforehand to prohibit such actions and even pursued it in court and then appealed, losing each time. My questions this afternoon are to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. What action has the minister taken in Alberta for AISH clients and their families in light of the Ontario Henson case? Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The AISH program, of course, is an excellent program. We have areas of income that are exempt, partially exempt, and nonexempt, and of course we have provisions for trusts as well. As he's asking the question today, I would have to get briefed on where the Henson trust would stand in that matrix of examination, then, of whether or not a person is eligible for AISH. I, of course, will do that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that answer, am I assured that the minister has not initiated action to provide that absolute discretionary trusts, or Henson trusts, are no different from other trusts so that benefits such as AISH can be withheld from individuals who have those trusts? Ontario did this very same thing, and they lost.

MR. DUNFORD: Well, as I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any sort of action that we've taken in this particular area, but that would be part of the examination, of course, that I would get into.

I just want to indicate to the hon. member and to other members that the AISH program is a very good program, and of course one of the things that we're trying to do is to look after the most needy people within our province. As this would relate, when you start getting into trusts and that sort of thing, certainly we'll want to have a look at it. Again, I think we need to be focused on the most unfortunate of us, not on people that have huge assets.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: has the minister's department prepared a legal case for withholding benefits from people in Alberta who hold Henson trusts?

MR. DUNFORD: I don't know what I can add to the previous answer. Again, it's part of the information that I've taken from the member. He provided me with a guest editorial from a publication just prior to question period. I've had a chance to quickly read it and, of course, will then seek more information.

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

#### **Charles Camsell Hospital Site**

MR. RATHGEBER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There exists within the Edmonton-Calder constituency a very valuable but vacant piece of real estate in the Charles Camsell hospital site. I understand that the province pays thousands of dollars with respect to this property for property taxes, heating, and other utility bills. My question is for

the Minister of Infrastructure. What is the government's plan with respect to the Charles Camsell hospital site?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some years ago the Charles Camsell hospital ceased being an acute care hospital. We had an appraisal done on the facility back in '99. It was subsequently listed with a real estate firm for sale. About two years ago we had an offer with a number of conditions on it, and the negotiations have been ongoing. There have been three extensions put on the negotiations. Each time, incidentally, the proponent put down a nonrefundable deposit. The most recent situation is that the conditions have now been removed, and by the end of May we will be closing the deal.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

### Meridian Dam Study

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently Albertans were able to pay \$100,000 for the Environment minister to research return on investment for the Taylor dam, money that could have been used to research how much groundwater we really have or develop essential conservation programs. My questions are to the Minister of Environment. Why does the return on investment carry more weight in your department than baselevel research?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, that she needs to get her figures and facts straight before she goes on with any further questions. The cost of the study was \$100,000, and \$25,000 of that was paid by the Saskatchewan government because they were partners in this study. They recognized the value of doing that study. Essentially, what has happened is that this dam has been talked about since the 1920s in this province, and we never had any hard economic facts on the dam. This study provided those facts and quite clearly proved, even to people in southeastern Alberta, that the dam was not economically viable.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the question again, because he didn't answer it. Why does return on investment carry more weight than baselevel research, which is what we need at this time?

DR. TAYLOR: The return on investment certainly is an important issue, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the member asked about any further environmental research, but to do the environmental side of the study, we would have had to spend a substantially greater amount of money in a further study. Since the economics simply weren't there to develop it, then it makes no sense to do the further environmental study and spend the money.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, does the minister have any serious plans for water conservation, as this is an essential component of any water strategy that he may come forward with?

DR. TAYLOR: Mr. Speaker, finally we can agree on something. The member has raised a very valid point that we've already talked about. I've talked about it publicly, and she's obviously been listening to me to give me an opportunity to expand on the water conservation issues. We're clearly looking at water conservation. We are doing this water strategy. We had a meeting in Medicine Hat last night which 84 people from southern Alberta attended. We

had a meeting in Calgary last week. We had to turn people away that came to talk about water conservation and other issues, and we are establishing another meeting in Calgary to take account of all the people.

2:10

Certainly I'll give the member one practical example that people in southern Alberta are talking about. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have pivots. Some urban members might not know what a pivot is, but a pivot is something that goes in a circle, shoots water up in the air, and waters a crop. One of the issues with pivots is that there's a lot of evaporation. If you go to something called a down-drop, that drops the water directly on top of the crops, you can save anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of the water that is being utilized for irrigation. So conservation is a huge part of what we're talking about, and I do thank the member for the excellent question.

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

MR. MASON: Nice pivot, Mr. Speaker.

### Municipal Policing Support

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, a task force studying policing for the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association found that Alberta has the lowest level of support for municipal policing in the entire country. For the 63 municipalities that contract with the RCMP, these towns pay three-quarters of the cost from their own property tax base. Cities with their own municipal police force pay fully 100 percent of the cost of policing. My question is to the Solicitor General. How can the Solicitor General justify the richest province in the country spending the least amount of provincial dollars in support of policing services in our municipalities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MRS. FORSYTH: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. The report that he is referring to I haven't seen yet, and I'm not going to comment until I do see the report. But what I will say is that the police in this province are well qualified, professional, and probably do the best job in the country.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, what does the Solicitor General have to say to those people in municipal government who believe that the government's posturing about getting tough on crime is a convenient cover for the lack of provincial financial support for municipal policing?

MRS. FORSYTH: Again, Mr. Speaker, the report he's referring to I haven't seen, but I don't believe for a minute that this government is posturing. Our police in this province do a great job with what they have, and I'm very proud to be part and parcel of them.

Thank you.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, when, if ever, can Alberta municipalities look forward to a reinstatement of at least some portion of the community policing grants that were cut in 1994?

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, the grants that he is referring to under the municipal grants were taken away and went to unconditional municipal grants through Municipal Affairs, and I'll have the hon. minister speak to that.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is very correct. Ultimately, we thought that what was most important was to allow local municipalities to determine where they can best use the resources that we give through the unconditional grant, such as for policing.

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

### **Fusarium-infected Grain**

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents tell me that feed shortages in southern Alberta have meant an influx of feed corn from the United States into our province. This feed is cheaper in most instances because it comes from a highly subsidized area. Fusarium can be prevalent in corn. Fusarium, if it enters this province, can be devastating to Alberta's crops. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can you tell me what the current status of fusarium-infected crops is in Alberta, and is the imported corn being tested for fusarium contamination?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, with your indulgence I would just like to take a moment to explain that fusarium is something that causes a head blight in crops. It thrives in very warm, moist conditions, and infected seeds or plant materials can spread during the flowering stage, especially in wet weather. It's important to know that because fusarium infestations can have a very serious impact on the quality of the grain, it is not accepted by milling plants and/or the malting industry and subsequently then becomes a source of feed grain. The danger in cattle feed is not as high because tests show that it mainly dissipates or is destroyed by the digestive system of cattle, so that is not as large an issue. However, what is an issue is if some infected grain might drop off a truck in transit or be spilled or left on the truck, and that raises the issue as to whether it causes a problem. To this point corn isn't tested at the border, and there aren't any restrictions on importing fusarium-infected grain. It's simply a matter of grading.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. OUELLETTE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is also to the minister. Can the minister tell us what initiatives are under way to stop this devastating crop disease?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, I've had a number of meetings with producer groups and municipal districts on this issue. We've had a number of solutions proposed. One certainly was a zero tolerance policy to fusarium-infected grain coming into the province. One of the solutions might be a certification of grain, and that would require the seller of any grain to produce a certificate saying that it was fusarium free. I should point out that fusarium-infected grain has the possibility of coming in from Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well as the U.S.

We have spent about a hundred thousand dollars working with the Canadian Grain Commission and Ag Canada on a study as to what we could do on a testing program. Whether we could actually police that certification if we put it in place is the question that's at stake now. We're going to continue to work with those producer groups and determine whether indeed that would be a wise move.

MR. OUELLETTE: My final supplemental, Mr. Speaker: why are we allowing subsidized corn to enter Alberta in the first place?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Corn is a commodity that trades freely across our borders, unlike wheat and barley. Of course, we would like to see freer trade in wheat and barley and the ability for our producers of those products to move them freely across our borders. Unfortunately, that's not allowed under our marketing practices under the Canadian Wheat Board. However, Mr. Speaker, the fact is that because of drought in southern Alberta and certainly some parts of the U.S. there is a large demand for feed grains. It has put pressure on our feed grains, and our cattle producers and our feedlots have been forced to bring in corn from other areas.

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

### **Midwifery Services** (continued)

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has spent 10 years and more than \$2 million investigating the integration of midwifery services into the provincial health system.

DR. TAYLOR: We already had this question.

MS BLAKEMAN: Wait for it.

Out of five provinces that regulate midwifery, Alberta is the only one that has failed to provide this birthing choice in its provincial health insurance plan. My questions are all to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Why is the minister willing to consider allowing nonhospital surgical facilities to perform insured services even if they don't save money, but he won't cover midwifery services until it is proven conclusively to be more cost-effective?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, I believe that I've already answered this question in referring to the question of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the leader of the third party.

I have and I will table, Mr. Speaker, the study that I referred to earlier, which is entitled Outcomes of Planned Home Births versus Planned Hospital Births after Regulation of Midwifery in British Columbia. The lead researcher was Dr. Patricia Janssen of the department of family practice at the University of British Columbia. We are looking at this. I should note that in this particular study it does refer to the number of midwives practising in the province of British Columbia in 1999. There were 58.

Mr. Speaker, this is an area of great interest. Again, we do want to use our health care professionals to the full scopes of their practice. We are examining this particular issue. Of course, in response to the requests of midwives last year who were facing high insurance rates, we did respond positively to that. There are continuing pilots that go on in the province, but the issue as to whether or not the provision of birthing services is cost-effective as provided by midwives has not been satisfied.

2:20

MS BLAKEMAN: Once again I'll repeat the question for the minister. Why is the minister willing to consider allowing nonhospital surgical facilities to perform insured services even if they may not be saving money, but he won't cover midwifery services until it's proven conclusively to be more cost-effective? You're not being fair here.

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the provision of services through private surgical facilities, we've relied upon the College of Physicians and Surgeons to indicate to us what procedures can safely

be done within a private surgical facility. I think research like that which I will table later on this afternoon may be helpful in helping us answer that first question: is this something that is safe to do in a nonhospital environment or without the need for a physician? Research like this will be helpful in answering that first question.

The second question though, Mr. Speaker, is: is it more cost-effective? We don't know the answer, but when she's comparing this particular procedure to services provided by private surgical facilities, we do know that the ability to use private surgical facilities does allow us to use our public hospitals better. So even if saving money is not part of the equation, it is a better use of our hospital facility resources.

MS BLAKEMAN: Further to something else the minister said to an earlier question, is the minister saying that 10 years of study on the integration of midwifery services was merely waiting for a process to be outlined by the recently released Mazankowski report? All those 10 years just for the Mazankowski report?

MR. MAR: I can't speak to the issue of the past 10 years, Mr. Speaker, but what I can say is that this that is an area of interest. It does fit within the recommendations set out by the Mazankowski report for us to consider new ways of doing things: being able to do them better, more efficiently; providing a better service at the same cost; providing better access. In the process that's been set up pursuant to the recommendations in the Mazankowski report, the 44 of them that this government has accepted and is moving forward on, the issue of should midwifery be covered in our health care system is a legitimate question that should be answered by our expert panel review committee and should be considered in the overall context of the health care system and not as a one-off.

### Environmental Priorities

MS KRYCZKA: Yesterday as an MLA and a member of the Bow River Basin Council I attended the Calgary Renaissance Emerald Irish breakfast in Calgary with guest speakers our hon. Minister of Environment and Robert F. Kennedy Jr., an American environmental attorney. Considering Alberta's many achievements in the area of environment, the most recent being William M. Mercer's annual quality-of-life survey results with Calgary being declared the number one city in the world over 215 cities, I found it baffling that Mr. Kennedy would see Alberta as a place to save from polluters. In particular, I found it very strange when, according to his own admission, there are many very serious realities or problems at home in the United States. My question is to the hon. Minister of Environment. Can you explain what your department may learn from Mr. Kennedy's area of expertise as it addresses Alberta's environmental priorities?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. TAYLOR: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say first of all that I enjoyed the opportunity to talk to Mr. Kennedy and the people at the breakfast and let them know some of the good things that are happening in terms of environmental protection in this province. Both Mr. Kennedy and I agree that there needs to be a balance between the economy and the environment, and where we differ is in how you reach that balance. There's a recent study out by the World Bank and the World Economic Forum that clearly shows that the countries that have the highest GDPs in the world also have the highest environmental sustainability index, so the U.S. and Canada have the highest environmental sustainability index. Countries with

the lowest GDPs in the world have the lowest environmental sustainability index, so countries like Haiti, Ethiopia, and Eritrea are mentioned in the report and have very low environmental sustainability indexes. That very clearly shows that there is a necessary balance between the economy and the environment, and a healthy economy equals a healthy environment.

Now, Mr. Kennedy has a strong legacy in front of him, and he is an excellent storyteller, Mr. Speaker. In fact, he never lets the fact . . .

THE SPEAKER: Hon. minister, please. Please. There is such enthusiasm extolled by people who seem to serve as the Minister of Environment. However, what has any of this got to do with government policy?

DR. TAYLOR: Certainly I'm prepared to talk to that, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Well, that's the only purpose of the question period.

DR. TAYLOR: What I'm going to say, Mr. Speaker, is that Mr. Kennedy never let the facts get in the way of his good stories, and what we can learn in Alberta from Mr. Kennedy is that all Albertans need to be aware of their environment, that all Albertans need to be involved in protecting their environment as we go forward. Quite frankly, his horror stories and fear tactics only present the worst case scenario and . . .

THE SPEAKER: Thank you. Thank you.

MS KRYCZKA: My first supplemental is to the same minister. Given that Mr. Kennedy criticized the Alberta government for not protecting the environment by not enforcing our own laws, can you please explain what Alberta is in fact doing?

DR. TAYLOR: Well, I'm very pleased to go on record again with this, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is recognized as having some of the toughest and most stringent environmental laws in North America.

MR. CARDINAL: And a good economy besides.

DR. TAYLOR: As well as, as a member points out, a strong economy.

I'll just give you some statistics, Mr. Speaker. In 2000-2001 we initiated 5,800 charges and 107 administrative penalties under various provincial environmental legislation, and that resulted in fines of more than \$1.4 million.

Now, the goal is not to fine companies or fine individuals, because what that means is that there is a mess already there that has to be cleaned up. Our goal is to prevent the damage through education. Our goal is to prevent the damage before it happens so we don't have a mess to clean up. Unlike Mr. Kennedy, who is a very good purveyor of science entertainment, we are interested in science facts.

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you. My second supplemental is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Given Mr. Kennedy's emotional rhetoric and scaremongering about so-called factory farms, could you please tell this Assembly and all Albertans what the definition of a factory farm is and whether Alberta does have any?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the term "factory farm" seems to be one that's popular to use in describing large operations. I



should just tell the Assembly that in Alberta we have quite a substantial number of cattle and hog operations as well as chicken, turkey, and dairy, and almost all of those are run by farmers and ranchers who are members of a community, who raise their children, do their business in those communities. We don't call them factory farms. They are family-run operations for the most part.

2:30

The one thing I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has taken three years to develop a policy to ensure that the intensive livestock, or confined feeding, operations in this province operate under clear rules that, one, protect the investment of the operator but most importantly protect the air, water, and soil. I remind our members that the people who operate these farms are the people who make their living off the soil, who breathe the air and drink the water and in my opinion are the best environmental stewards we have.

#### head: **Members' Statements**

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

#### **Constable Christine Diotte**

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to rise today to join in solemn remembrance of an RCMP officer who was killed in the line of duty on Tuesday, March 12. Yesterday hundreds of police officers from across Canada, together with paramedics, firefighters, and other law enforcement officers, joined community members and grieving friends and family to pay tribute to 35-year-old Constable Christine Diotte, a dedicated officer, wife, and mother. After a service at St. Mary's Catholic church in Banff more than 600 law enforcement officers formed a procession in her honour with an RCMP helicopter flying overhead in tribute to her exemplary service to the RCMP and our communities. Christine was laid to rest in the field of honour at the Canmore cemetery, near her home, with full regimental honours.

Constable Diotte was investigating a rollover accident west of Banff when another vehicle lost control and struck her and her partner, Constable David Davis. Even though seriously injured, Constable Davis courageously attended the funeral and was helped by paramedics as he stood and saluted the passing motorcade.

Christine was a strong role model for youth and focused her career on drug prevention while serving for six years in Hinton and on the Bow Valley victims services unit and DARE program during her tenure at the Banff branch. Alberta has lost one of its finest young citizens, and for that we all share in the sadness of this tragedy. I know that the memory of Constable Diotte will carry on through those she loved, the lives she touched, and through the programs that she so passionately supported. As one of her colleagues stated so eloquently yesterday:

We are very thankful for the unselfish sacrifices Christine made in the service of her country, her determination, courage and personal commitment and enthusiasm she displayed in a job that she loved.

I would like to express my deepest condolences to the family of this great Albertan. My thoughts and prayers are with her husband, Mario, and daughters Ami and Gina during this very difficult time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **National Farm Safety Week**

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize and bring attention to the National Farm Safety Week campaign, running

from March 13 to March 20. This year the campaign will highlight the theme Livestock Handling Safety: Put Your Best Foot Forward.

Animal-related incidents account for about 30 percent of all injuries and deaths on farms across Canada. Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development takes an active role in providing information and promoting farm safety year-round. Farmers are encouraged this week to take stock of their knowledge and expertise in handling livestock safely.

Other sources of valuable information and recommendations are the personal experiences of farmers from around the province. There's a dairy farmer in Camrose who sets a good example by ensuring that he is outfitted in the best of safety footwear after suffering a minor injury. There is also a farmer from High Prairie who leaves a note for his wife every day just so she knows where he is working on the farm in case of an emergency. Almost every farmer in Alberta could and should relay a safety-related story.

While we highlight safe practices during this national campaign week, we know that safety on the farm is a yearlong everyday necessity. The long-term strength of the agriculture industry and health of our farmers depends on it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

#### **Calgary Aquamums Synchronized Swimming Team**

MS KRYCZKA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I begin by sharing some personal thoughts I had while sitting in the Legislature last week. My thoughts were that in just 10 days my daughter Kelly would be leaving her husband and four young daughters for Christchurch, New Zealand, to compete with her team and duet partner in the 30- to 44-year-old category of synchronized swimming at the World Aquatic Masters Championships from March 28 to April 4 with a total of 2,800 athletes and that I wouldn't be going with her, but worse than that, I hadn't even considered what I might do to send her and the team on their way. I realized my commitment as an MLA, as with many of my colleagues, tends to distract us from relating daily to the very real lives of our families. But since then, I have acquired appropriate Alberta gifts, a very large Alberta flag, and those ever popular Alberta/Canada pins thanks to many colleagues. Maybe I'll just add some of mom's baked brownies.

Mr. Speaker, I do wish to recognize the Calgary Aquamums team, the masters' extension of the world renowned Calgary Aquabelles Synchronized Swimming Club. The team of eight are still very athletic women who have each made a personal commitment for the past year and a half to be reunited in a sport they all love. Raising children and doing community work or pursuing careers is very time consuming, but they have remained focused on doing something rewarding and fun for themselves.

Fourteen to 18 years ago as younger athletes they formally retired after competing and winning acclaim at provincial, national, and Olympic levels. They then got on with their lives with further education, careers, marriage, and children. But it was so exciting for me to join their families and their fans and to see them swim their competition routine Sunday evening at Lindsay Park centre.

After countless hours of practice but not as many as in the old days the return to superb fitness has indeed brought back the skill level that makes synchronized swimming such a beautiful sport.

I invite all members of this Assembly to join me in wishing the Aquamums team good luck at the World Master Aquatic Championships: Shirley Dawson, Carol Fitzsimmons, Raphaela Jablonca, Robyn Kaser, Myrna Kruger, Kelly Kryczka-Irwin, Michelle Paget,

Nicole Sadinski, and coach Kim Strachan. They leave in just three days.

Your families and many Albertans are very proud of you already. Good luck in New Zealand.

### Rural Quality of Life

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about the quality of life in rural Alberta. As our caucus travels throughout the province, farmers and rural residents tell us that struggling to maintain their quality of life is becoming increasingly more difficult. Although changes in rural conditions have many sources, the Conservative government continues to ignore pressing concerns. Once more this government's relentless pursuit of profits before people has seriously jeopardized rural quality of life. In fact, recent census figures show that many towns and villages in Alberta are facing slowdowns in their population growth while others have had actual population decreases. What was once a noble tradition of living close to the land can now become a hazard to one's health, and it is our rural communities which will suffer.

Mr. Speaker, I recently introduced a bill to eliminate all but emergency gas flaring in this province thereby reducing the incidence of disease and contamination faced by Alberta farmers. Instead of showing their concern for farmers and their livestock, the members of the Tory government showed their preference for the energy industry. They defeated the bill, thereby protecting corporations from their need to meet environmental responsibilities.

The same pattern holds for intensive livestock operations. We know that developing these massive projects has the potential to bring in sizable profits, but we also know that ILOs pose tremendous threats to the quality of our air and water. The government continues to promote ILOs at the expense of family farms and neighbouring communities. Interbasin transfers are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to this government's plans to manage our water supply. The Conservative government's disregard for water safety means that what oil companies don't pollute ILOs will contaminate.

Finally, I would like to voice concerns about the accessibility of health care facing Albertans in small towns and on farms. Albertans are now discovering the very real threat of acute care beds being closed in rural areas. The shortage of medical services will only be exacerbated as the government pursues its commitment to introduce profits into our health care system. People who need health care will have to travel farther and pay more.

These issues will not simply disappear, though Alberta's family farms and rural lifestyle may. The New Democrats are committed to taking positive steps to maintain and enhance rural quality of life.

### head: Introduction of Bills

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

### Bill 19

#### Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2002

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased today to request leave to introduce a bill being the Veterinary Profession Amendment Act, 2002.

Mr. Speaker, this act would amend the provisions of the Veterinary Profession Act that govern public membership, investigation, discipline, and appeals proceedings for the veterinary profession in Alberta.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 19 read a first time]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

2:40

MR. STEVENS: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move that Bill 19 be moved onto the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders.

[Motion carried]

### head: Tabling Returns and Reports

THE CLERK: Pursuant to Standing Order 37.1(2) I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited today with the office of the Clerk: return to order of the Assembly MR 12 asked for by Ms Carlson on May 23, 2001, hon. Mr. Norris, Minister of Economic Development.

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

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier in question period today in answering a question directed at me by the hon. leader of the third party as well as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre, I referred to a research paper that was done that is found in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* dated February 5, 2002. It's entitled Outcomes of Planned Home Births versus Planned Hospital Births after Regulation of Midwifery in British Columbia. It is prepared by a research team that was led by Dr. Patricia Janssen, department of family practice, University of British Columbia. I gave an undertaking at that time to table the same, and I do so now.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is on behalf of the Member for Lethbridge-East, who has copies of petitions that are requesting help in stopping "the funding cuts to supports for children and adults with developmental disabilities." There are 425 signatures on this petition, which brings the total to 725 including the tablings he made last week.

The second tabling today is the appropriate number of copies of letters from Ms Kiza Holstead of Edmonton, Mr. Herbert Kariel of Calgary, Miss Wendy Adams of Calgary, Mr. Torsten Buckholz of Calgary, Miss Madeleine Oldershaw of Calgary, Miss Weslyn Mather of Edmonton, Mr. Jorn West of Calgary, and Mr. Melvin Dunford of Calgary. These Albertans want the government to take appropriate steps to protect the Bighorn.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have five copies of a letter written by Denis Chalifoux, who's a resident of Spruce Grove. It's a very thoughtful letter, and he is concluding with:

This situation has extended far beyond the realm of the teachers' strike and is eating away at the core of our democratic society. I am appealing to you to do whatever you can to put a stop to this current rant against teachers.

Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table for the information of all hon. members of this Assembly the actual posted pool price schedule from yesterday, March 18, 2002, of course, from the Power Pool web site. It indicates that last night at 8 o'clock the price of electricity in this province was 17.2

cents a kilowatt-hour. The temperature goes down; the price of electricity goes skyrocketing.

Thank you.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies of some extensive analysis done by Mr. D.R. Hargrave of Calgary into the impact of the combined effects of the flat tax and the health care premiums, and it illustrates that the highest tax bracket in Alberta now is for people just over \$32,000 income a year for a seniors couple.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first one is a letter of resignation from Doug Heckbert of Fort Saskatchewan. He was a member of the Attendance Board of this province until March 12 of this year, and he resigned in protest against the ill-advised back-to-work order issued by this government, first, and then, of course, the provisions of Bill 12, which in his own words he finds "disgusting, pathetic and dictatorial." That's the first tabling, and I hope the members of this House would like to read that letter.

The second is a copy of a letter from one of my own constituents, Ms Elizabeth Wall, asking me to urge the government to make midwifery services a funded service under the provincial health care insurance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling five copies of a report prepared for the Parkland Institute titled *Advantaged No More: How Low Taxes Flattened Alberta's Future*. The report is calling for a major rethink of economic policy, including the abandonment of the single-rate tax in favour of a more progressive taxation system, repeal of the province's Deficit Elimination Act, and creation of a revenue stabilization act.

THE SPEAKER: Additional tablings?

Hon. members, following brief comments yesterday and pursuant to Standing Order 15, the chair did receive from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie an indication that the hon. member would like to pursue a purported point of privilege in the Assembly. I was advised yesterday of her intent to do it, but one of the hon. members who might be impacted by this purported point of privilege was unavailable, so we'll now proceed with it today.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

### **Privilege Contempt of the Assembly**

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a point of privilege under Standing Order 15 on what we consider to be a contempt of the House. On the issue of contempt, Marleau and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* says on page 52 of the 2000 edition that "any conduct which offends the authority or dignity of the House, even though no breach of any specific privilege may have been committed, is referred to as a contempt of the House." It also continues on to say: "Contempt may be an act or an omission; it does not have to actually obstruct or impede the House or a Member, it merely has to have the tendency to produce such results."

*Erskine May*, on page 111 of the 22nd edition, in discussing misconduct of members, states:

The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt. In 1963 the House resolved that in making a personal statement which contained words which he later admitted not to be true, a former Member had been guilty of a grave contempt.

Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday afternoon, March 13, the Member for Edmonton-Centre asked the Solicitor General questions about changes to how certain criminals, including sex offenders, would be reporting to probation officers. The Solicitor General answered that sex offenders would still be considered high risk, when a document from her office indicates that some sex offenders would actually be downgraded to medium risk. The relevant portions of the exchange from page 316 of *Hansard* are as follows. Edmonton-Centre's first question was: "Can the Solicitor General confirm that her department has plans to reduce the reporting requirements of sex offender parolees?" In her answer the Solicitor General said, "No, we are not letting sex offenders out early," even though that was not the question. "They still will be considered a high-risk offender, number one."

This is very important, Mr. Speaker. She said that "they still will be considered a high-risk offender." Yet a government document says: sex offenders and violent offenders shall be considered medium until initial classification; the decision to reduce supervision from medium for sex offenders and violent offenders shall be carefully documented and must be reviewed by the responsible branch manager/supervisor. Please note that it says "reviewed" and "documented," not that the decision shall be made by the branch manager or supervisor.

Section 2 of the Corrections Act, though, states:

The Minister is responsible for correctional services under the jurisdiction of the Government of Alberta and in particular for . . .

(b) the provision of probation and parole supervision and counseling services to offenders against the law.

So we state that this is clearly within her responsibility.

The Member for Edmonton-Centre then said in her first supplemental question: "I'm asking about the frequency of reporting. Will there be a change in the frequency of reporting for sexual offender parolees?" The Solicitor General clearly answered no.

On Thursday afternoon, March 14, three sets of questions were asked to follow up on the previous day's attempt, to offer the Solicitor General an opportunity to clarify her knowledge of the issue. Instead, the Solicitor General introduced more contradictions. On page 364 of *Hansard*, in response to a question from the Member for Edmonton-Centre about high-risk offenders, the Solicitor General stated: "The Solicitor General does not make the criteria for the probation officers." She continued by saying, "They are the [ones] that determine the reporting requirements, when they are required to report to the probation officers." Perhaps they determine what time of day, Mr. Speaker, but the minister, the Solicitor General, is the one who is responsible for the policy direction, as was clarified in a question to the Premier yesterday. Her comments, clearly, again are in contradiction with the Corrections Act, which the Solicitor General is responsible for. Section 2(b) of the act states that she is responsible for "the provision of probation and parole supervision."

2:50

In an answer to a follow-up question, the minister tries to displace responsibility. On page 364 of *Hansard* she says: "Parolees are a federal responsibility. We deal with probation officers; the feds deal with parole and parolees." However, in the context of what we were discussing and had raised by then in over three sets of questions, she

is wrong. The Corrections Act clearly states in section 4 when defining probation officers:

A probation officer . . .

- (b) is an officer of every court in Alberta insofar as that designation is consistent with the provisions of the Criminal Code (Canada) and this Act respecting probation or matters of a like nature . . .
- (d) is by virtue of that office a peace officer when appointed a parole supervisor under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (Canada) . . .
- (f) shall supervise parolees paroled under this Act and placed under the probation officer's supervision;
- (g) shall comply with the instructions of the director of a correctional institution whenever that probation officer is attached to the correctional institution for the purpose of parole or probation investigations or for pre-release or community release or other program purposes that require the presence of a probation officer in the correctional institution.

The Solicitor General also told the House that "parolees are a federal responsibility." Still, it's clearly outlined in the Corrections Act that there is also a responsibility of the Solicitor General. Section 4(b) tells us that a probation officer is responsible for parolees and probationers. The minister is the one who is unwilling or unable to share this full information with the House.

Finally, when asked yet again about changes to the classification of criminals, the Solicitor General said quite clearly again that there was no change when, again, her own document shows that there was. In response to the question from myself that time, on page 364 of *Hansard*, the Solicitor General stated:

The sex offenders designated as high risk or high profile will be reporting with the same standards as they always have. Let me repeat that it's the probation officers that make that determination, not the Solicitor General.

Again, she has repeated two things that appear inaccurate to us: that sex offenders will report with the same standards – some maybe, Mr. Speaker, but not all of them – and also that she does not set the standards. It is within the responsibility of the Solicitor General to do so.

So based on this information and some additional information that I supplied to you yesterday, Mr. Speaker, in terms of comments made by the Solicitor General outside of this House, we find her to be in contempt and would ask you to rule on this matter.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. member, in terms of other, additional information, if the hon. member would table such in the Assembly at this time, I think that would be appropriate. All members should have access to such.

MS CARLSON: Thank you. I will do so, although I don't have the appropriate number of copies. We will make those shortly and table the information.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the opportunity to clarify my answers and provide the House with the facts. On March 13 I was asked if my department has plans to reduce the reporting requirements or the frequency of reporting of sex offenders. My answer was no. My answer was not intended to mislead this House. Most sex offenders are classified as high-risk offenders. In addition, many of these sex offenders who are serving a community sentence are on a conditional sentence rather than on probation. When I responded to the hon. member, I was referring to the sex offenders who fall into these categories.

Mr. Speaker, my ministry is planning a pilot project that would reduce the minimum mandatory reporting requirements for offenders who are on probation. All high-risk offenders on probation and all conditional sentence offenders are excluded from this pilot. For the purpose of reassuring this House, I would like to add that all young offenders who are under community supervision are also excluded from this pilot.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of the pilot project and of a second pilot project, that will use case aides, is to examine ways to give probation officers more flexibility to deal with growing caseloads. I should add that these suggestions were made with the input of probation officers themselves. I want to be clear that any offender considered by the probation officer to be high risk is not eligible for the pilot supervision standards. The proposed standards have not yet been implemented. We plan to introduce them in April for a six-month pilot in two of the 40 probation offices in Alberta, and their effectiveness will be carefully evaluated before we take any steps to implement them provincewide.

Mr. Speaker, I was asked why I have refused to hire 22 more probation officers. This is a target number for new probation officer positions that has been raised by the union representative. There is currently a governmentwide hiring freeze in effect. In addition, my ministry does not have the resources to hire more officers. While it is not possible to hire more probation officers, my ministry has reassigned experienced correctional staff into community corrections wherever possible. Over the past several years my ministry has reassigned 50 positions from correctional centres into community corrections. That practice will continue whenever possible.

Last Friday, Mr. Speaker, I met with probation officers in Calgary, and I made a commitment to examine the population in our correctional centres to see if efficiencies can be found to result in more transfers of correctional centre positions into community corrections. Clearly, since conditional sentences came into being in 1996, the trend in sentencing by the courts has been towards a greater emphasis on community corrections and less on incarceration. It is common sense that over time we will continue to deploy our resources in new ways to meet emerging needs.

Mr. Speaker, last week one of the hon. members asked if I had discussed at a meeting with probation officers changes that would drop dangerous criminals, including sex offenders, into groups that check in less frequently. My answer was no. My ministry has no intention to introduce such changes. As I have already said, the proposed pilot project will not change supervision levels of high-risk or dangerous criminals. I was also asked if the only criteria of these pilot projects is cost saving instead of the safety of women and children. I have already pointed out that high-risk offenders are not and never have been part of the pilot project. This pilot will not change the nature of the offenders who are already in the community by court order. Again, I must reiterate that as part of probation supervision, the pilot will not affect the mandatory minimum supervision standards for any offender who is assessed as a high risk, who is on a conditional sentence, or who is a young offender.

I would also like to point out that my ministry has a partnership agreement with the Edmonton and Calgary police services to monitor high-risk offenders. The hon. member also wanted to know whether other criminals with a history of violence – for example, offenders convicted of domestic violence or armed robbery – will no longer be considered high-risk offenders and will report less frequently. As I have stated, there is no plan to decrease supervision levels of offenders determined to be high risk. High-risk offenders are not part of the proposed pilot project. Mr. Speaker, for the record, I would like to table a letter from my ministry to all probation officers, dated March 7, 2002, that makes clear the proposed pilot project guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, I was also asked to provide guarantees that less qualified workers will not just rubber-stamp the files. Under the second pilot project I mentioned earlier, three case aides who are experienced correctional service staff will be transferred internally to community corrections. The intent of this pilot is to determine whether the use of trained correctional services staff who are hired to focus on specific lower risk cases will enable other probation officers to focus more of their time on high-need and high-risk cases. Mr. Speaker, this pilot, like the pilot on supervision standards for low-risk offenders, was suggested by probation officers. Until we have tried it, we will not know whether it will help address the problem of workloads. The pilot will also be carefully monitored and evaluated and will not be expanded to the rest of the province unless the results demonstrate that it has merit.

3:00

The hon. member contends that a document from my office indicates that some sex offenders will be downgraded to minimum risk. The document referred to is the Community Corrections and Release Programs Branch Policy Manual. The policy statement referred to has been in effect since 1997. The point in question in the policy manual reads: "All new probation cases, with the exception of violent offenders and sex offenders, shall be considered minimum until they are initially classified." Sex offenders and violent offenders shall be considered medium until initial classification. This is not a change to supervision standards. This policy has been in place since 1997. To make sure that we are absolutely accurate about this, I should mention that other sections of the manual were changed in 2001, but this particular section was not. The intent of the policy is to ensure that sex offenders and violent offenders who are sentenced to probation are seen by a probation officer for their initial assessment sooner than other offenders placed on probation.

Mr. Speaker, here is the process that's followed when someone is sentenced to probation. Anyone sentenced to probation is normally seen by a probation officer as soon as the court has signed his or her court order. At that time the probation officer explains the process and the penalties they will face if they do not abide by the terms of the probation. As I said, this normally occurs within a day or two after sentencing. The next step requires the probation officer assigned to the case to do an assessment based on the offender's crime and case history. As per the policy manual, all sex offenders and other serious offenders are classified as medium risk until the probation officer has assessed the offender's risk to the community as well as the offender's risk to his or her own person.

There is an important fact to bear in mind about offenders who are on probation or who have been given a conditional sentence. In both cases the court has determined that the offender does not pose such a risk to the community that he or she requires incarceration. Mr. Speaker, while we may not agree at all times that such sentences are properly handed down, the decision rests with the court, and the court bases its determination on the offence and the facts of the case. It is our job to manage this supervision within our community. In other words, the court has determined that the appropriate sanction for the offender is not time in a federal penitentiary and not time in a provincial jail. The court has determined that offenders on probation or on conditional sentence are a manageable risk within the community. Probation is one of the lowest levels of punishment available.

Let me explain how sex offenders on probation or conditional sentence in Alberta are supervised. An important fact is that sex offenders make up in total only about 5 percent of the probation officer's caseload, including offenders on conditional sentences and

probation. The same policy manual I referred to earlier indicates under standard 2 that "all offenders shall be classified and supervised according to the standards outlined in guidelines for offender supervision." These guidelines state the lowest allowable frequency of contact. Probation officers have the authority to require the offender to report more frequently if they believe it is in the best interests of the public and the offender. Once a probation officer has classified an offender and has specified the frequency of contact, the offender is directed to report accordingly.

The hon. member has pointed to the example of a priest convicted of sex offences against children who has had his supervision standards set at medium. Mr. Speaker, because of privacy concerns I cannot speak directly to that case. However, I would like to state that I have advised my department to investigate the case. In general terms I can say that when a sex offender has completed treatment programs and has lived up to the terms of his probation over an extended period of time, it is possible that this offender could have his or her supervision standards set to medium. If offenders abide by their probation orders and if their probation officer determines that their risk level has decreased, they could have their supervision levels reduced. I must emphasize that this should not happen without a thorough and careful assessment.

Mr. Speaker, it has been suggested that I have blamed probation officers for changes in supervision levels. Section 2 of the Corrections Act of Alberta says that the Solicitor General is responsible for providing probation supervision and counseling to offenders. However, probation officers themselves determine the classification and the reporting requirements of offenders on probation. The Solicitor General is not required to personally perform their duties. That is recognized in Alberta law, a principle known as the Carltona principle. This says that where the exercise of discretionary power is entrusted to a minister of the Crown, it may be presumed that the acts may be performed not by the minister in person but by the responsible officials in her department.

The criteria for classifying offenders as high risk have existed in policy for a number of years. Policy guidelines outline high-risk criteria as follows: a high potential for violent or suicidal behaviour, a medical or mental health history that indicates a need for special attention, or offenders whose crime by its nature resulted in widespread public concern. You will note that the term "sex offender" does not appear anywhere in these criteria. Yet, clearly, any or all of these criteria could apply to a sex offender. The policy also clearly spells out that probation officers are required, based on their professional judgment, to accurately assess and classify offenders appropriately and to determine which offenders are high risk. Mr. Speaker, probation officers are given their responsibility because they are trained professionals, and day in and day out they do a very good job under very difficult circumstances.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member contends that I misled the House when I said that parolees are a federal responsibility. Part 3, section 24, of the Corrections Act of Alberta states that the National Parole Board has jurisdiction in Alberta under the federal act. Section 25 of the Corrections Act of Alberta enables the province to establish a provincial parole board. However, while Alberta has the right to establish a parole board, it has not done so. In addition, Alberta has not been responsible for supervising parolees since 1995. The federal/provincial community corrections exchange of services agreement between Ottawa and Alberta was terminated in 1995. While that agreement was in place, Alberta probation officers did supervise federal parolees. Since the agreement was terminated in 1995, Alberta probation officers have not been responsible for supervising federal parolees.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to clarify my answers

from last week. I would also like to confirm for the members of this House that I intend to continue working with probation officers to address their workload concerns. For the benefit of Albertans as well as the members of this House I would like to reiterate my commitment to preserving Alberta's safe communities. I hope that my work on the Protection of Children Involved in Prostitution Act and on the national sex offender registry will go some way to reassuring this House of my dedication to working on behalf of women, children, and all Albertans.

3:10

THE SPEAKER: On this purported point of privilege, the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. STEVENS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make a few comments on this particular point. The complaint made by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie relates to questions that were posed on two days last week and is set out in a letter to yourself dated March 18, 2002. The hon. Solicitor General has just spent the last 15 minutes or so responding point by point to the various allegations that were made in general in that letter that you received and, from my perspective, has provided a great deal of information to the House that we heretofore did not have before us on a matter which by parliamentary standards is relatively unknown in question period or in debate in this House. I thank the hon. member for that.

It seems to me, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie correctly stated the nature of contempt in referring to the various citations. The one point that was not underscored, which you do on a regular basis when matters of privilege or contempt come before the House, is that those matters are most serious and, indeed, are the most serious matters which we ever deal with. I would agree with the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie that deliberately misleading the House would be contempt, but I think that that is where we get into the facts of the case. The hon. Solicitor General, as I said, has spent some 15 minutes addressing the facts of this particular case on a point-by-point basis.

First of all, as you, Mr. Speaker, like to point out on a reasonably regular basis, all hon. members are indeed honourable, and at the outset of the Solicitor General's comments she quite clearly indicated that there was never any intention to mislead in the answers that she gave. Given the nature of question period, our responses are not complete, and indeed I would say that there is no way that anyone is expecting a complete response. What the hon. Solicitor General has done this afternoon is provide us with the complete response, which I'm sure has clarified matters, but from where I sit, in listening to the charge and in listening to the answers, it seems to me that that is in fact what this hon. member has been doing this afternoon. She has repeated and expanded upon the answers that she gave before to provide us all with a foundation of understanding on this particular point that will assist us going forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, the point of my comments on this issue is that, first of all, the hon. Solicitor General has indicated that her responses to questions and answers last week were not intended to in any fashion mislead the House, so there was no aspect of being deliberate. Secondly, the answers themselves, the elaboration, indicate a consistency with the response and would also be another ground for no basis of contempt being found this afternoon.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, I appreciate and thank all those who participated in this discussion this afternoon. There was a rather large-ranging amount of information, and I think that in fairness to all concerned, I will take the Blues, the text, study it this

evening and tomorrow morning, and report back to the House tomorrow afternoon with respect to this matter.

## head: **Statement by the Speaker**

### **House Business**

THE SPEAKER: There are just a couple of other points, though, that I'd like to make, totally unrelated to what we've just done. Yesterday six private members' public bills were introduced. The members who held positions 217, 218, and 219 have chosen not to sponsor private members' public bills this session. Accordingly, the next bill to be considered by the Assembly after Bill 216 will be Bill 220. The Member for Calgary-McCall has Bill 213 on notice but has not introduced it as of yet. Also, members will note that standing on the Order Paper are government motions 13, 14, 15, and 17, all relating in some way to Bill 12. As Bill 12 has now received royal assent, the chair will have these motions removed from subsequent versions of the Order Paper as they are now not capable of being moved.

Finally, when copies of the private members' public bills were distributed yesterday, the front pages of bills 211 and 212 were reversed by the printer. A point of order was raised about this obvious printing error in Committee of the Whole. Although the chair does not usually comment on what occurs in committee, on this rare occasion the chair will comment as the matter should have been raised in the Assembly in the first place. The printing error was quickly noted, and the printer ensured that replacements for bills 211 and 212 were available to the Assembly by the time the evening sitting commenced last night. It's the chair's understanding that the replacement copies were distributed at that time, and this matter should now be resolved.

## head: **Orders of the Day**

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

#### **Bill 18** **Social Care Facilities Review Committee** **Amendment Act, 2002**

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

MS EVANS: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make the following comments as we move second reading.

The proposed amendments will shift the focus of committee visits from inspections and investigations to service reviews. The definition of a social care facility will also be amended. The Social Care Facilities Review Committee reviews social care facilities in Alberta; in other words, a place operated by or receiving funding from the Alberta government, facilities such as family day homes, group homes, and alcohol and drug abuse treatment centres. The committee serves as a voice for clients. It ensures that the views of social care facility residents are heard and provides an ongoing mechanism for feedback. The annual report of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee provides a provincial overview of the committee's findings as well as a summary of its activities. It is tabled in the Legislature.

The intent of the amendments, Mr. Speaker, is to support government direction respecting the committee's new mandate. Consultation on the amendments has been done with the committee itself as well as other affected departments including Health and Wellness, Community Development, Human Resources and Employment, and the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Provincial Board. The current definition of a social care facility does not reflect the manner

in which services are delivered today. The amendments will update the definition to include only those facilities under the direct mandate of the Children's Services ministry.

If the amendments are passed, regulations will be developed to designate facilities under other departments to come under the jurisdiction of the Protection for Persons in Care Act. These changes are necessary, Mr. Speaker, because the committee reports its findings and makes recommendations to the Minister of Children's Services, and as a result it is appropriate that the committee visit only those facilities under this ministry's jurisdiction. The protection of vulnerable adults cared for in facilities has been ensured with the proclamation of the Protection for Persons in Care Act. I remind the House that amendments to the definition of facility will not be proclaimed until a regulation under the Protection for Persons in Care Act is developed.

Narrowing the definition of facility fits with the review committee's new mandate to carry out reviews instead of doing inspections and investigations. In fact, since the committee's inception in 1978 the committee has primarily conducted reviews as opposed to investigations. A review involves meeting with service recipients and their families to obtain feedback about their satisfaction with the services being provided. How a program is delivered and client satisfaction will be of paramount concern in the review process.

3:20

An amendment will be made for the Minister of Children's Services to retain authority to direct the committee to conduct an investigation. Through Bill 18 the committee's accountability to the minister will be clarified and strengthened. The committee will be accountable to the minister through the chair, and the minister may give directions through the chair regarding the committee's roles and responsibilities.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Another new addition will be that the committee must submit a report to the minister upon completion of an investigation or review. This will clarify the reporting requirement respecting reviews and investigations. These changes are necessary to address the issue of overlapping jurisdictions and to update the definition of a social care facility. I ask for your support of second reading.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to make a few comments about Bill 18, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee Amendment Act, 2002. At second reading we're concerned with the kind of principles that the bill is built on or, in this case, the amendment is built on. I think one of the major shifts is the shift from inspection to a service review. I think that that shift shouldn't be done without some questioning and without some concerns being raised.

The kinds of facilities that this bill refers to and encompasses are those that house children. As we know, because there are so many people involved in operating these facilities across the province, there's a wide range in the level of the service that's offered and there's a wide range in terms of the facilities that come under the purview of the act. We've had some rather devastating evidence of facilities, particularly day care facilities, not being adequate and the kinds of services available to children being less than satisfactory. There have been problems with medication, there have been problems with food, there have been problems with the facilities that have been provided for children, and there's a concern about the inspection role being downplayed and the total focus on service.

Now, one would hope that if the service review was being made, any shortcomings in terms of the facilities and any kind of a hard look at the facility itself would be done as part of that review, but there's still the concern that the inspection of the facilities will suffer. That rests, I guess, with another provision of the bill, and that is the loss of comprehensiveness. In the previous bill the direction to the committee was that they would visit each facility in the province from time to time, and that has been changed. The "all" has been taken out, so there's no assurance that at any time the facilities in the province will have been reviewed by the committee, and that has been raised as a concern to us by some of the advocates who are interested in these kinds of facilities. There has to be an assurance to the public that when there are children who are being financed by provincial government funds, those children and the facility they're in will be subject to inspection and that someone won't get away without having someone look at the facility at some time.

One of the other principles that seem to undergird the bill is the notion of the centralization of more of the decision-making into the minister's office. This has been a concern not just with this bill, Mr. Speaker, but with a number of actions taken by the ministry, and it finds itself evident in at least one other bill that's before the Assembly this session. I know the arguments are made in the interests of accountability from the minister's perspective, but I think it's viewed by some of those service providers as being a centralizing of power and a centralizing of decision-making that works against the interests of providing service to clients. So it's something that we've noted before and something that I think we have to be very careful of. I can understand the minister's concern. Certainly, the minister is held accountable when things go wrong and must feel at times somewhat put upon by being held responsible for actions that she doesn't seem to have any direct control over, but I think it still is an area where we have to proceed rather carefully to make sure that that gathering in of the power to the minister's office is really appropriate in trying to provide services for children.

I guess one of the other parts of the bill – and I would appreciate a response from the minister – is that the specific language about complaint-making has been dropped, and I wonder exactly what was considered in terms of a citizen who would like to make a complaint about a facility, a parent who has a youngster in a day care or who knows of such a facility. What is the process, and why was the mention of complaint-making dropped from this amendment? I think that that process has to be abundantly clear to people. Again, we've seen in this city day cares who come under severe, severe complaint from parents and from people interested for not providing appropriate facilities for children in terms of play areas and recreation areas and even the kinds of food that were served to youngsters. I think it's such an important issue that it has to be very, very clear to the public how such complaints are to be handled.

I think that with those comments, we'll be supporting the bill with some reservations, Mr. Speaker, and I'd appreciate, again, hearing from the minister. Thanks very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has moved that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. members, in order to allow adequate time to prepare for the Budget Address by the Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House is recessed until 4 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.]

### Transmittal of Estimates

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

THE SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Order!

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, the Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2003, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2003, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

### head: Government Motions

21. Mrs. Nelson moved:

Be it resolved that the messages of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2002-2003 estimates and business plans, and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, prior to moving Government Motion 22, I now wish to table the 2002-2003 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2002-2003 government and lottery fund estimates.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the government's consolidated fiscal and business plans for Budget 2002 as required under sections 4 and 7 of the Government Accountability Act. Budget 2002 also includes business plans for each ministry, which must be made public under section 13 of the same act.

### head: Budget Address

22. Mrs. Nelson moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

MRS. NELSON: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is a place like no other. We are an incorrigible lot, fiercely proud, compassionate beyond words. We deliberately face into the wind every chance we get. That description comes from a recent history of our province, but it rings through my mind as I stand here to introduce Budget 2002.

Throughout our history of ups and downs, booms and busts, Albertans have shown an uncanny ability to stare down the worst possible adversity. When the storms of challenge and change gust through our province, we do not turn our backs nor search for corners to hide behind. We face directly into the wind. We tackle our problems head-on. We make the right decisions, and we move on, deliberately, decisively, and with our eyes firmly fixed on building a better future for our province.

As I stand here today, March 19, it's a year ago today that my colleagues and I were sworn into cabinet. Little did I know what this year would bring: the worst drought in Alberta's recorded history, forest fires raging out of control throughout the summer, a dropping Canadian dollar and collapsing stock market, mounting expectations and increasing costs, dramatic drops in the price of oil and gas, and Canada joining the war on terrorism. For the first time in many, many years we watched as a group of fine Alberta men and women went off to war thousands of miles from home. This is a different place than a year ago today, yet we've made it through.

We've faced each one of these storms, made the right decisions, and kept Alberta strong.

Mr. Speaker, these are challenging times not only in Alberta but around the world. It's a time of uncertainty, a time when great optimism for the future is bounded by the shock of September 11, the reality of lower oil and gas prices, and uncertain markets in the United States, in Canada, and around the world. Alberta is not immune. As much as we pride ourselves on setting our own course, we are once again facing forces that simply are beyond our control.

While Alberta's economy continues to be strong, dramatic drops in the price of oil and gas translate directly into a huge hit on provincial revenues. The harsh reality is that resource revenues fell by 44 percent last year and are expected to fall again this year.

Faced with these challenges, this is the promise we will make to Albertans. We will keep our vow to balance the budget. Alberta's budget will be balanced this year and every year. We will not compromise the future of our province by spending money we cannot afford. We will not take the easy way out. Albertans will continue to pay the lowest overall taxes in the country, and we will not stray from our legislated commitment to pay down Alberta's debt. A debt-free Alberta is a dream that continues to be within our grasp as long as we stay the course and keep our eyes on that achievable prize.

With Budget 2002, Mr. Speaker, we will do what Albertans expect from a Ralph Klein government. We will face the challenges head-on, and we will make the right decisions. Our goals are clear: to keep the budget balanced in spite of substantial losses in revenue, to sustain our commitment to health and education, and to build a future that undoubtedly will be bright for our children and our province.

For Albertans watching and listening today, they will see a mix of three strategies in Budget 2002. For the first time in seven years our government will take deliberate action to raise revenues. This is a measure we do not take lightly, but we simply can no longer shield Albertans from the combined impact of higher costs and lower revenues. Personal income taxes will not go up, and there will be no sales tax in Alberta. At the same time, though, people will pay more for health care insurance premiums, a pack of cigarettes, a case of beer, and a bottle of wine. And if you speed, you'll pay more in fines. In total, these and other revenue measures will raise \$722 million. That money will go directly to maintain our priorities: a health system we can count on and a good education for our children. Even with these steps, total provincial revenues for 2002-2003 will still drop by 5.6 percent, or \$1.2 billion, compared with last year.

Secondly, we will deliberately trim our spending plans to meet the size of our pocketbook. Lower than expected revenues have brought us all back down to Earth. We will continue to spend substantially more money on health, education, and programs for children and Albertans who need our support, but those increases will not be as high as some would like or expect. We simply can afford no more.

Following through on steps already taken last fall, we will continue to defer, delay, and substantially change some of the funding commitments announced last year or in previous years. That means a number of major capital projects will be delayed until we can afford them. Planned reductions in corporate income taxes will be phased in at a slower rate. A number of programs will be reduced, revamped, or eliminated entirely. In total, spending in 2002-2003 will drop by 8.1 percent, or \$1.7 billion, compared to last year.

4:10

The third essential strategy is to never turn our backs on a proven formula for fiscal success. Alberta's tried-and-true formula includes balanced budgets, prudent forecasts, responsible spending, and



deliberately paying down the debt. The formula works, Mr. Speaker. It has become the hallmark of our government and the envy of every other province in the country.

That's the big picture. Now for some details. Mr. Speaker, 2001-2002 was a difficult and dramatic year. After basking in the glow of the biggest resource revenues on record just a year ago, the harsh reality began to hit. Albertans understand how volatile the province's revenues can be. They know that when energy prices go up, they can just as easily come crashing down.

Last summer we began to warn Albertans that the winds of change were coming. Oil and gas prices were declining. Then came September 11, an event so devastating that it sent shock waves around the world. Without knowing the full impact, we took action, anticipating the worst. We kept our spending in check and prevented any chance of falling headlong into a deficit.

One of the challenges we face in Budget 2002 is balancing two very important but contrasting facts: on the one hand, a strong Alberta economy and, on the other, dropping provincial revenues. There is no doubt that Alberta's economy is strong. Our economy grew by 4.5 percent last year, leading the rest of Canada once again. Nearly 44,000 new jobs were created in the province. Talk to people in towns, cities, and communities across the province, and they're optimistic about the future. Things are good. People are working. More businesses and individuals are investing in Alberta. All signs point to continuing growth in the province's economy. In fact, we expect another 35,000 new jobs this year, and Alberta's economy is expected to grow by 2.5 percent. That's outstanding growth, Mr. Speaker, in the face of turbulent times.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, the province's revenues show a starkly different picture. We're now facing a situation where the strong, positive outlook for Alberta's economy does not translate directly into rapidly growing revenues for the province. This time last year we anticipated that revenues would start to decline, but the shock was how fast and how deeply they fell. Weaker energy prices, lower investment income, and lower corporate tax revenue resulted in a loss of \$1.6 billion. To address that dramatic drop, our government is taking deliberate steps to raise revenues. We cannot and we will not force all of the adjustments on the spending side.

Health care insurance premiums will increase on April 1. Individuals will pay another \$10 a month. For families the increase will be \$20 a month. Mr. Speaker, if we want the best, if we want a high-quality, accessible health system – and we do – then we all need to share in its costs. The last time health care premiums were raised was in 1995, and at that time they made up about 16 percent of the spending on health. Since then, premiums have been frozen but health spending has increased by over 87 percent. With this year's budget premiums will now cover less than 13 percent of the cost of the health system. At the same time, we know that premiums hit some families harder than others. We will not pass on the burden of increasing costs to Albertans who can least afford it.

With changes in this year's budget over 440,000 individuals and families will benefit from the enhanced premium subsidy program. Our first priority is to help low-income families with children. With this year's budget 16,000 more Alberta families will pay no health care premiums whatsoever, bringing the total number of families who pay no premiums to almost 61,000. Over 28,000 families who paid the full premium last year will now only have to pay part of the monthly premiums.

Steps will also be taken to shelter low-income seniors from the impact of rising health care premiums. One hundred and eighty thousand seniors who currently receive subsidies will not be affected by the increases in premiums, and another 8,000 seniors will only have to pay a portion of the increases. Almost 165,000 Alberta seniors will pay no premiums at all.

Cigarette taxes will go up by \$2.25 a pack effective midnight tonight, and other tobacco taxes are going up as well. This is a dramatic increase. Mr. Speaker, it goes beyond any desire on our part to simply generate more revenue. If we can stop one young person from starting to smoke, if we can stop young people from becoming addicted to tobacco, we can save lives in the future. We'll create healthier Albertans, and we'll help reduce costs in the health system for years to come.

Effective April 1 liquor markups are going up too. The increases will bring our prices closer to those in our neighbouring provinces. It means that Albertans will pay up to 45 cents more for a bottle of wine, 60 cents more for a bottle of liquor, and about 40 cents more for a case of beer. This will add \$50 million to provincial coffers.

Taken together, these and other decisions in Budget 2002 will add \$722 million to provincial revenues. While some will undoubtedly question these increases, the objective is beyond dispute: to protect priority programs and to balance the budget.

At the same time, let me make one message very clear. We cannot continue the spending track we have been on, a track that showed overall spending increasing at a rate of almost 8 percent a year over the past five years. While this year's spending levels will be down considerably from last year, that's primarily because onetime spending commitments will end and debt-servicing costs are down thanks to our deliberate steps to pay down Alberta's debt.

Spending on health and education, on programs for children and those who need our support will continue to increase but at a pace we can afford. For 2002-2003 our first priority is to put Alberta's health system on a sustainable track for the future. As promised by Premier Klein, we will implement the recommendations of the Premier's Advisory Council on Health. Comprehensive health reforms will begin this year. Overall spending on health and wellness will increase by 7.3 percent, or \$468 million, by far the largest increase in spending in this year's budget. Regional health authorities will receive an overall increase of 6.7 percent.

In the coming years health budgets cannot continue to grow faster than long-term increases in provincial revenues. Targets for future increases will be limited to 4 percent, an amount we can afford on a long-term basis. Mr. Speaker, it's time to face reality head-on. All other areas have taken a backseat so we can continue to pay the growing price tag for health care. Things have to change.

4:20

Let me turn from health to one of the most important things we can do for Alberta's future, and that's to ensure that we have the very best educated young people. The young people in our schools, universities, colleges, and technical institutes will shape the future of the province. We owe it to them to make sure that they can compete with the very best in the world. In this year's budget support for basic and postsecondary education will increase by 4.7 percent. We'll spend just under \$3 billion providing basic education to children in schools. Another billion dollars will go to universities, colleges, and technical institutes to help ensure that our young people get the education and the skills they need to succeed and contribute to Alberta's growing economy. Funding for scholarships and student assistance will also increase in this year's budget. Over the next three years spending on basic and postsecondary education will increase by 12.5 percent.

Mr. Speaker, in order to channel funding into health and education, difficult choices had to be made. As a result, corporate tax reductions will proceed but at a slower rate and over a longer time period. On April 1 tax rates will fall by half a point to 4.5 percent for small businesses and 13 percent for other businesses. The tax threshold for small businesses will increase to \$350,000. The result

is that Alberta businesses will save an additional \$81 million in taxes.

We will also continue with plans to delay a number of capital projects announced last year. Over \$700 million in infrastructure spending was deferred in 2001-2002 alone. This year a further \$631 million in infrastructure projects will be put on the back burner until we can afford them. Later this month we'll look at the financial picture as the current year wraps up. If dollars are available, we may be able to advance additional onetime funding to support some infrastructure and transportation projects, but that's only if we can afford it. In the next three years our spending on infrastructure will drop to about \$1 billion a year.

Mr. Speaker, let's put this in perspective. In the last three years Alberta's spending on infrastructure – on roads and schools and hospitals and other projects – grew to more than triple the average of other provinces. Since 1999 our government has provided an additional \$3.5 billion in onetime accelerated infrastructure funding. That money supported highway construction projects and important capital projects for municipalities, school boards, health authorities, and postsecondary institutions. With the money already in their hands construction can proceed over the next few years. In the next three years we will spend \$1.7 billion maintaining and upgrading Alberta's roads and highways. This includes \$211 million in grants to municipalities.

Funding for community lottery boards will end March 31, and savings will be redirected to help support health and education. In future years the savings will go to existing foundations that support the arts and recreation, to the Wild Rose Foundation and to other community initiatives. These are difficult decisions, Mr. Speaker. We know the impact they have on communities and municipalities. In the longer term we are optimistic that municipalities and the government can work together to put important capital and transportation projects back on track, but this year's continued high levels of funding are simply not possible.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of difficult decisions in this year's budget Albertans understand how important it is to stay on track, to keep our eyes firmly fixed on a responsible fiscal course. As I mentioned at the outset, we do not know what tomorrow will bring. The office of the provincial Finance minister does not come equipped with a magic crystal ball. Those who dare to guess the price of natural gas for the next three years peg it anywhere from \$2.65 an mcf to \$4.60. Each 10-cent fluctuation means \$163 million more or less for the provincial coffers. Oil price forecasts range from a low of \$18 a barrel to a high of \$26.50. For each dollar difference we could gain or lose \$108 million.

Mr. Speaker, some would say: just wait and see; things will pick up. We can't. We won't take that risk. We can't base a budget on this week's oil price, and we will not put the future of essential programs and services at risk while we sit with fingers crossed wishing and hoping that optimistic forecasts will come true. This budget is based on the price of gas remaining at about \$3 an mcf and oil hovering around \$20 a barrel. Also, as required by legislation, we have set aside an economic cushion of \$724 million for this fiscal year.

Our tried-and-true fiscal formula is the right course to take. It may be cautious. It may turn out that there is more good news to come. But, Mr. Speaker, if we stick to this formula, we will in the long run have the first debt-free province in the country, we will continue to have the lowest taxes in Canada, and we will build a great future for this wonderful province of ours.

In the coming months we'll also have the advice of a new Financial Management Commission to guide us in decisions about how to shape the future fiscal course of our province. I'm proud to announce that David Tuer has agreed to chair the commission. We look forward to his work on this commission and the sound advice that I know they will provide.

Mr. Speaker, one of the toughest questions a Finance minister gets asked every year is: what does this budget mean for an average Albertan? It's a tough question because it sounds so simple. It's so important, yet it's difficult to answer in simple terms. To me the answer lies this year in these important points. It means that some tough decisions were made to raise revenues, scale back spending, and delay projects until we can afford them, but in return this is what we'll get: a sustainable health system with new ideas and new approaches, a good education for our kids, continuing programs for children and people who need help. Most of all, I know that Albertans understand that in the face of challenging times their government has made the right decisions.

I quoted Winston Churchill in my Budget Address last year, and his wise counsel deserves repeating this year. Churchill said, "There is only one duty, only one safe course, and that is to try to be right." Trying to be right is the key. There is no certainty given the times we're in. We cannot guarantee that we will be right, but we have faced the uncertainty head-on and preserved what Albertans value most.

Mr. Speaker, as I said at the outset, Alberta is a place like no other. We do not duck or hide. We solve our problems today rather than pass them on to future generations of Albertans. Once again with Budget 2002 we are facing into the winds of change, facing the challenges head-on. Whatever storms and uncertainty the coming months might bring, I have no doubt that this time next year Albertans will bask in the glow of an even brighter, more solid, and prosperous future for our children, like my son Troy, and grandchildren. Albertans have put that responsibility in our hands, and, son, we will not let you down.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, I would now request that we adjourn debate on the 2002 budget.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

MR. HANCOCK: Mr. Speaker, I would move that the Assembly do now adjourn until 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:32 p.m.]