

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, April 22, 2002**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 02/04/22

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Hon. members, welcome.

Let us pray. Though we as legislators of this great province and its people are taken from the common people and selected by You to be architects of our history, give us wisdom and understanding to do Your will in all that we do. Amen.

Hon. members, would you please remain standing so that we may participate in the singing of our national anthem, and we'll ask Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us.

HON. MEMBERS:

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

THE SPEAKER: Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Premier I'm pleased to introduce a number of guests from the Alberta Public Affairs Bureau. As all members know, the Public Affairs Bureau is the communications arm of the Alberta public service. The guests here today are seconded to many different government ministries and of course are vital to the successful communications that the government and the public service have with Albertans. They are here as part of an orientation tour. They are seated in the members' gallery, and as I call their names, I would ask them to rise, and at the conclusion of naming them all, we would give them the traditional warm welcome of the House: Jackie Bibby, Ron Bos, Rachel Bouska, Johanna Dietrich, Anne Douglas, Jamie Edwardson, Jeremy Fritsche, Dan Huang, Terry Jorden, Kari Larson, Carey LeVos, Lori Lindquist, Kim MacDonald, and Chris Mikaluk.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is that I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly constituents of mine, Nancy Cornelius and her son Dan, who have included in his home schooling studies a tour of the Legislature and to be with us here today to observe the proceedings of the House. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

My second group, Mr. Speaker, is a group of 26 students and six adults from Parkland Village School, which is just north of Spruce Grove. This a lively and bright group who asked some great questions when I was able to visit with them last fall. A note I would like to mention is that Parkland is a year-round school, and the general consensus is that it is a great success. Their teacher is Mrs. Laurie Maycher and teacher's aide Mrs. Louise Rose. The

parent helpers are Mr. Bruce Neville, Miss Cindy Bukmeier, Mrs. Cari LeGrow, Mrs. Suzie Veysey. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you a group of social work students from Grant MacEwan Community College who I believe are due to graduate from their two-year program fairly soon. This group of students undertook an initiative at their college recently and collected over 400 signatures on a petition dealing with the subject of safe and affordable housing in Alberta. I met with members of the group last week, and they presented me with the petitions, and they're here today to see their participation in the political process come to fruition as I present their petitions to the Assembly. These soon-to-be social workers are Mary MacKinnon, Catherine Hosein, Barbara Jadischke, Rachele Andre, Connie Fleming, Christina Deboulet, Lucrecia Mendoza, Alma Swann, and Tami Biagi. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the course of time many Albertans have contributed to the excellence of our education system. Today I'm honoured to introduce to you and to other members of the Legislature one such gentleman. He is the recently retired superintendent of schools for Parkland school division. I'd ask Dr. David Young to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Environment.

DR. TAYLOR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to rise and introduce Robin Kurpjuweit. Robin is a former constituent of mine. He worked very hard on my campaign, and he's a young man that's very interested in politics. Robin is now with a program out of Langley, B.C. He's the program co-ordinator for a program called How To Drug Proof Your Kids. It works with other drug prevention programs like DARE and with the RCMP and so on on drug proofing kids. He had the opportunity to meet with the hon. Minister of Children's Services this morning and found it to be a very profitable meeting. One thing that's exciting about this program is they don't ask for government money. Robin, please stand and take the warm welcome of the House.

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

MR. MAR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, in recognition of Hope Week, April 21 through 27, 2002, and the important role that hope plays in maintaining the wellness of Albertans, I wish to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Jean Wilkinson, president of the Hope Foundation of Alberta, and Joan Mason, chair of the Hope in Action Gala Committee, who are seated in the members' gallery. On the 26th of April here in the city of Edmonton the Hope in Action gala will take place. I would ask Mrs. Wilkinson and Ms Mason to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

MR. LUND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a great deal of pleasure today to introduce some first-time visitors to the Legislature from Rocky Mountain House and Calgary, Jack and Dolores Killick and their charming daughter Carmen. They're seated in the members' gallery. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Ms Shirley Howe and Mr. Ken Smith. Ms Howe is the acting Public Service Commissioner for the government of Alberta, and Mr. Smith is the Deputy Minister of Energy. Both Ms Howe and Mr. Smith are co-chairs of a group of senior Alberta public service executives who are profiled in the cover story of the latest issue of the national magazine *Canadian Government Executive*, and I will be filing appropriate copies of that article later on this session. The magazine article is about the very successful corporate human resources development strategy that is here in the Alberta public service, an initiative led by Ms Howe, Mr. Smith, and their team. I would ask Shirley Howe and Ken Smith now to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a very special visitor in the members' gallery. George Jendyk, mayor of the village of Onoway, is here today, and he's met many of my colleagues and some ministers today. George is in his third term on council. He's been elected since 1995, and in 2001 George was elected as mayor. He has served on many committees for council, including the ambulance authority and seniors' housing. George is also a teacher at the Onoway elementary school. He's a member of the Royal Canadian Legion and has served as a longtime member of the Masonic lodge. I ask George to rise and receive a warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

PDD Boards

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government's budget for Community Development allocates funding for various persons with developmental disabilities boards in the province. Now, less than a month later, with the ink barely dry, we learn that the government has changed these allocations and made adjustments to the level of funding for the various boards. My questions are to the Premier. Why were changes made to the level of funding after the budget was introduced?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, as I understand it, the budget contains an 8 percent increase for PDDs, but I'll have the hon. Minister of Community Development respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's true that from time to time we do have to take a look at how we're delivering these important programs for persons with developmental disabilities, and

that's why in response to a lot of community feedback and a lot of contact with our own MLAs and community agency workers we were very pleased this year to accomplish another 8 percent increase in addition to the 8 percent that we increased last year. But giving more money to the system alone is not necessarily going to find the kind of improvements we need for this very vulnerable group of individual Albertans. We also have to take a look at how we deliver those programs on a per case basis, and that is part of the review that has been going on ever since the Building Better Bridges report was written by myself and others a few years ago. We will continue in that same vein to ensure that this population gets the services they require.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They didn't get the question. Why is it that there were changes in the allocations made between what shows in the budget and what numbers were given to the boards that they were to use to build their business plans? There's a difference between the budget level and what the boards got. Why the difference, Mr. Premier?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, again I'll have the hon. Minister of Community Development explain, if he can, the answer.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Sure. The fact is that back when the 9 percent projected increase last year had to be pared back, as with all government agencies, by 1 percent, we did the same thing, so some of the anticipated increases at that time could not flow out the way they had anticipated to be able to flow out. So we're flowing them out this year, and by the end of April all of the regional boards will have had an instruction from the PDD Provincial Board with respect to clarifying the amounts and how those amounts are to be applied. Some of them, as you know, are labeled for PDD uptake. Those that are coming to us as children turning adult are fairly easy to predict, but there are a number of others that come in which we're not aware of on as timely a basis, so it's a little bit complicated. The other funding increases will flow out for community agency workers, and none of that is easy to forecast too far in advance, but by the end of April it will all be done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They still didn't get it. Why is it the numbers in the budget are different than the numbers that you sent to the PDD boards saying "these will be the dollars that you will get this year to operate"? Which is the right number: the number you're stating in the budget or the number that you put in your material that you sent out to the boards?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, let me try this again. By the end of April these numbers will be finalized. What we're working on from one year to the next always are projections, and that's what a lot of those figures have been based on, hon. Leader of the Opposition. Now, if you have something very specific that you want to share with me that I'm not aware of, I'd like to see it, because the numbers that are going to be confirmed will be done in about a week's time, and I'd be happy to give them to you as exact as they are. Please bear in mind that a lot of these programs and services change from month to month with certain recipients because they do show improvements, and we're constantly upgrading the services that we provide and the types of programs that are designed for them. So being really, really that specific sometimes is difficult, and that is the truth.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess from that, our budgets don't really mean anything, so I'll try some service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, many disabled persons rely upon Persons with Developmental Disabilities for support and service even though those services do not fall under the mandate of PDD. We now learn that persons with developmental disabilities boards are examining various cost-cutting measures, including moving nonmandated services out of PDD. My questions are to the Premier. Given that shifting programs from one ministry to the other does not improve service delivery or lower costs to the government, why is Community Development allowing PDD boards to examine this option?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know that to be true or untrue. I would assume that PDD boards examine various ways to achieve efficiencies and ways to provide more effective forms of services. Relative to the details I'll have the hon. minister respond.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thanks. Mr. Speaker, the important thing here is that no one who qualifies for services under the PDD programs will be denied that service. We're very proud of that record, and we're going to ensure that it continues. When I wrote the report a couple of years ago, there were certain services at that time that were being looked upon as perhaps being withdrawn. We did not withdraw them in the end. The government responded very positively, and in fact we're adding more and more to that program to make it a much more improved system for all these individuals across the province. There are about 8,000 people receiving this service, and we're providing service that is unparalleled anywhere else in Canada when it comes to the degree to which we get involved with them through our regional boards and when it comes to the comprehensiveness of the programs that we are providing.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the minister: can the minister guarantee that PDD clients who now receive these services will not fall through the cracks because of programs and services being juggled to other departments? How can he guarantee that they'll still get those services?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm personally not aware of any programs that are being juggled or hived off anywhere else. If there are some programs out there that can be delivered through a different model or a better system, I'd be happy for the hon. member to share those with us. I can guarantee you that anyone who qualifies for services as a person with a developmental disability will continue to get that service, and that's what's important here. That's why we increased this year's budget by \$30 million: to look after those individuals.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier guarantee that programs that are moved out of PDD will continue to receive funding at a level that they had under PDD when they end up in a new department?

MR. KLEIN: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister responded

by saying that he knows of no programs that are being moved out. Again I'll have the hon. minister respond.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me be really clear. If the hon. member has some kind of a document that says something along this line, I'd like to see what that is. It's true that there are from time to time a lot of individuals and organizations out there that require some examinations of some of the programs. Those do get looked at on a regular basis so that we can stay as current as possible and provide the best possible service within the dollars and the framework available. Again, anyone who is eligible for PDD services receives that service, and we're very proud of that.

THE SPEAKER: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

WCB Early Resolution Initiative

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Friday the WCB held an information session on a pilot project called early resolution initiative, that changes the way the WCB handles internal case reviews. This is on the eve of the introduction of Bill 26, which is also anticipated to deal with changes to the internal WCB review process, though how substantial is yet to be seen. My first question is to the Minister of Human Resources and Employment. How can the WCB get around existing law since their pilot project does not utilize the Claims Services Review Committee or the Assessment Review Committee, both of which are provided for in the WCB act?

Thank you.

1:50

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I will be introducing a bill later this afternoon that deals with the amendments to the Workers' Compensation Act. As a matter of fact, the issue that the hon. member is raising has to be dealt with and will be dealt with in the provisions of that act.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. Given that the early resolution initiative was discussed at a public meeting on Friday, April 19, can the minister tell the House: is it mandatory for all current cases to be involved in this pilot project, or is it voluntary?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: It's a pilot project, Mr. Speaker, and I'm not sure of the exact term of reference that WCB has put on that particular pilot. In any event, we are introducing a bill today. We have a second reading, a committee reading, and a third reading to go through before it would be legally binding as law. Again, it's mostly enabling legislation. It's there to help the people that this hon. member has tried to care for and tried to represent their views in the past, with some success I might add. This is one more response by both the Workers' Compensation Board and this particular government to respond to the needs of injured workers.

MR. MacDONALD: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: then why was the early resolution initiative discussed before the hon. minister had the opportunity to table the bill in the Assembly?

Thank you.

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I don't see any sort of conspiracy here. Now, perhaps I'm missing something. It seems quite common

these days for people to get out ahead of legislation, before it is actually tabled, and this appears to be another case of that. Certainly, from what I can understand from what the member is saying, it sounds like the intentions of the parties are good, and I don't know what the beef is. If there's something that he wishes to formalize by way of a formal complaint, then I would suggest that he put it in writing.

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

Teachers' Labour Dispute

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The memorandum of understanding reached last Friday between the government and the province's teachers wasn't so much a negotiated settlement as it was a surrender, with the Minister of Learning popping out of his foxhole just long enough to wave the white flag. This comes after several months of job action, closed schools, and canceled extracurricular activities, all of which were completely avoidable. My questions are to the Premier. Why did the government reject the olive branch offered by the teachers two months ago when teachers voluntarily agreed to submit to a fair and impartial binding arbitration process and instead enact a punitive piece of legislation?

MR. KLEIN: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where the hon. leader of the third party has been, but the union took us to court on the OC that was passed, and much to their surprise they won. [interjections] And much to our surprise as well. Absolutely. Much to everyone's surprise. So I guess it's a matter of, you know, the teachers getting what they asked for, not that they really wanted it, I'm sure. That resulted, then, in legislative action that had to be taken to ensure that teachers would go back to work and that the students would be looked after.

I might remind the hon. leader of the third party that the only thing that is back in the agreement, albeit in an amended form, is the pension issue, and that is for a one-year period. I would remind the hon. leader of the third party that that was always on the table, and it was taken off when the teachers went on strike. In my meeting with Mr. Booi there were three things that we agreed to.

DR. PANNU: Four.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, they were not at the meeting. What were they doing? Did they have their ears up against my door? Were they listening? Do they have some unknown vent, you know, or some snooping device? They were not at the meeting. I can tell you that the hon. leader of the third party was not at the meeting. He wasn't anywhere close. If he was close, you know, will he please advise this Legislature where he's getting his information and if he has a secret peephole or a listening device?

Mr. Speaker, three things were agreed to. One, Mr. Booi agreed that there should be a legislated arbitration process; two, that it should deal with the issue of salaries and that other issues relative to the sustainability of education would be referred to a blue-ribbon panel or some kind of a commission; and three – and it's in the notes – that we would revisit at some time the pension issue.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier be a little more contrite and apologize to Alberta students and parents for putting them through several months of unnecessary misery given

that the elements of the settlement with teachers had been there all along?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I will apologize to absolutely no one. This agreement was reached. I understand that the hon. minister participated in a news conference on Friday with Mr. Booi there. Both the minister and Mr. Booi seemed to be totally satisfied with the deal that had been hammered out by third parties, in this case lawyers for the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the government of Alberta. It served to end an impasse relative to teachers withdrawing voluntary services and refusing to mark exams. It involved something that we agreed to revisit in the first place, and that was the issue of teachers' pensions.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final supplementary to the Premier: since one of the features of last Friday's agreement is a loosening of the arbitration rules, will the government make up financial shortfalls resulting from any arbitration awards, or will the government compound the problem by forcing school boards to cut in other areas?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. leader of the third party that significant increases have been granted to education this year, and indeed over the past five years there's been a substantial increase in education spending of about 41 percent. One of the terms of the arbitration process, Bill 12, the act now, is that school boards cannot incur deficits, and to that point I will have the hon. minister respond.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under the agreement that was signed on Friday, it was established that the interpretation of deficit would be that they could not run a deficit at the end of the day. The arbitrator must be satisfied that the deal can be reached without running a deficit.

Mr. Speaker, I will add a couple of other things if I may. This line of questioning has been about the agreement that was signed on Friday. This agreement was signed because of the willingness of this government, the ATA, and the ASBA to put aside their differences for the sake of Alberta students. It's very unfortunate that the other side will not do that.

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

Education Funding

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently I have been in contact with two teachers in Calgary. Teacher number 1 told me that she has 27 students in one of her classes, 12 of whom require constant one-on-one attention for various reasons. Teacher number 2 told me that her class has 24 students: six on individual program plans, 11 as ESL, three with attention deficit disorder, and four considered average. Given that our government's K to 12 education budget has been increased continuously since 1995 – I notice that the rate was over 41 percent – still there is clamour about lack of funding. I do not want to talk about the big number of many millions. I just want to ask the Minister of Learning about the amount of funding at the classroom level that the teacher is supposed to have for her class. Could the minister tell us: what are the current budgeted rates of instruction funding per student per category of need?

2:00

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The average student in the province of Alberta receives roughly \$7,500. Included in that are add-ons for things such as English as a Second Language. There are add-ons for the Alberta initiative for school improvement. There are add-ons for sparsity and distance. There are add-ons for growth and density. There are add-ons for severe special needs. All these issues are what determine how much funding goes to the school board for the classroom. In general, probably the best number that I can give the hon. member on a systemwide basis is about \$7,500 per student.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you. Without being exact, could the minister give us just a quick estimate on the instruction funding only for each of the classes mentioned above based on the rate and the number of students?

DR. OBERG: Mr. Speaker, just doing simple mathematics, for 27 students it would be a little over \$200,000; for 24 students it would be around \$180,000. Again I will reiterate that there are a lot of extras that are added on; for example, an extra 12 and a half thousand dollars for a severe special-needs student. All of these are added on in conjunction with that. With respect to an average class, it would be a little over \$200,000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. CAO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: again without being exact, could the minister give an average in total of the education funding for each of the above classes?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, we recently did a study that showed that the average size of a class from grade 1 to grade 6 would be 23.6. Say we rounded that up to 24, that would put the actual number of dollars going to that particular class, assigned to the classroom, at about \$180,000, so a very large amount of money going to the classroom. That does include administrative usage of the dollars as well as transportation and things like that. In general, it would be around \$180,000.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Foster Parent Program

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The time for reviews is over. The Children's Services ministry must now take real action in order to prevent any more tragic deaths of children in care. My questions are to the Minister of Children's Services. Given the recommendations of the Korvette Crier fatality inquiry, will the minister now require that all foster agencies be accredited?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, accreditation as we know it today is not a perfect model. It is a move towards a perfect model, I guarantee, but there are several things that we have to do about accreditation. Should all foster agencies be accredited? Absolutely. The only ones that heretofore had not required accreditation were those where delegation of authority had been provided on reserves. They were accredited, but the situation in this particular case, going back three

years ago, Mr. Speaker, was that there was – and this is far from the accreditation issue. It was an issue of communication. It was an issue where the worker did not realize that the agency that was delivering services was not accredited for the purposes of providing foster care. So it's not a simple issue of accreditation or saying that they should all be accredited. It's a situation whereby in this particular case there was not a recognition that the agency wasn't accredited.

Let's be clear in this Assembly. Somebody paid dearly. The child in question paid dearly, and so did somebody go to jail. We have had accountability in the system, because somebody was charged, and there was a recognition that even if there had been accreditation, the action that was taken was an inappropriate action. Our society through our courts recognized that.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister commit to giving all foster parents standardized training?

MS EVANS: Well, Mr. Speaker, we do. We give at least 67 hours of basic training. We give incrementally more training to foster parents as the need arises, particularly if they are dealing with children with particularly tough situations. If they have developmental disabilities, they get more training. They get a variety of supports, and as written by the current parent support executive director for foster families in Alberta, they get extensive training. In this situation, again a very unfortunate circumstance, the situation evolved because the parent that was providing the foster care did not have appropriate training and support for the work that was done.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: will the minister commit to implementing a standard policy on how many foster children may be placed in one home?

MS EVANS: Mr. Speaker, we're working very hard to make sure that the right number are placed in the right home at the discretion of the local authorities. You can't just treat people like widgets and have a standard number. You have to look very carefully at what the circumstances are with the child and the parent involved, what the age of the child is, and whether or not they have any developmental disability. You have to look clearly at the child and the capacity of the family to provide the services involved. It is not a simple standard. It's a very important thing for us to look at a very clear and defined process for evaluating what the child needs and for evaluating whether these children are all members of one family or not and whether it's wise to split up siblings. We look at this from a variety of points of view, but we look at it, again, bottom line, from what's in the best interests of the child or the children involved.

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

Oil and Gas Royalties

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta depends on revenues from oil and gas royalties to finance important government programs. My question is to the Minister of Energy. Does Alberta's royalty increase to reflect the increasing value of the resource as the reserves diminish?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, as is known, it's sometimes yes and sometimes no. The royalty regime, first of all, is an economic rent. It is clearly defined to reflect the province's ownership of the resource. It is not a tax. It is not a levy. It is not a policy instrument. It is ownership to reflect economic rent. In fact, this economic rent changes, whether you're in Alberta, Alaska, Norway, Louisiana, with the type of structures you have, the relationship that you have with the people who build the industry. For example, with oil sands today we get 1 percent of the revenues from the product that's generated in that area. That is a program put in place that has, along with some other major tax considerations, enticed some \$51 billion Canadian in investment. Then all the economic benefits accrue from that.

Mr. Speaker, once those investments are paid out, we get some 25 percent of the net oil sands production. We are the only jurisdiction in the world where, as conventional production declines, our oil sands are actually increasing so that we are able to replace depleting reserves. That luxury will allow us to deliver appropriate economic rent to Albertans today, tomorrow, and for the productive life of the oil sands.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wonder if the Minister of Energy has any notion of the timetable when we might expect to get economic rent from synthetic oil royalties on par with conventional oil royalties.

AN HON. MEMBER: Good question.

2:10

MR. SMITH: There's a good question, as one member has pointed out, Mr. Speaker. This year will be the second year that nonconventional, or oil sand oil, production will in fact surpass that of conventional oil. Conventional oil peaked at 1.3 million barrels a day back in 1973. Today we will produce some 1.4 million barrels of oil, which will be about 600,000 barrels conventional and 700,000 to 800,000 barrels of nonconventional oil, or oil sand oil. This gives us the ability to ramp up these investments, have these investments pay out, and as our royalty diminishes from the results of its decreased production, we will be able to increase the royalty take from the oil sands.

Some of the early indications, Mr. Speaker, would indicate that royalty revenue from the tar sands would ramp up sometime in the year 2005-2006. One of the difficulties in timing that is that the oil sand takes up so much of Alberta's skilled apprenticeship and labour production. In fact, in a province that has only 10 percent of Canada's workforce, we are working today well over 20 percent of the apprenticeship workforce across Canada. So this creates increased costs. We are a partner in sharing those increased costs, and our royalties will not increase until such time as those costs are paid out.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is this: do we as Albertans get a fair return, as compared with other jurisdictions such as Alaska or Norway or Louisiana? I guess the basic question: are we getting our money's worth, or are we getting ripped off?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member has a solid, solid question. In fact, we have an entire section of people both in oil and

gas, some hundred plus individuals, whose job is not only the collection of these royalties, these economic rents for Albertans, but actually to scan the competitive marketplace of the world to ensure not only that we remain competitive so as to continue to attract global investment but that we also remain fair to Albertans and deliver the maximum amount of economic rent available.

So, in fact, Mr. Speaker, if we were to compare ourselves with Alaska, Alaska's gas, that is shut in, that is waiting for a pipeline, has a royalty charge of some 12 and a half percent. Our royalty on gas can go up as high as 35 percent. We average about 20 to 23 percent. If you take a look at Norway, they are in fact moving towards some royalty holidays to find new pools of gas. In Louisiana much of that land is owned freehold or by individuals, and therefore the state can only gain revenues by a severance tax. In many analyses and analyses from respected individuals in the oil and gas industry Alberta is rated as one of the very toughest regimes for economic royalties in the world.

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

Justice System

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government believes in justice for all people except maybe poor people. In the last budget the filing fee for the small claims court jumped 300 percent. However, at the Court of Queen's Bench, where more affluent people go to file much larger claims, the filing fee remains unchanged. My questions are all to the Minister of Justice. Does the minister believe that it is justifiable to charge a person a \$100 fee in small claims court to try and get back a \$300 damage deposit?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things which we're trying to accomplish in the justice system is for people to take responsibility for their own issues and try and resolve them in the best way possible. In the Provincial Court, Civil Division we've had for the last two to three years a civil mediation project where we pay essentially an honorarium to people who volunteer their time, other than for this honorarium, to help mediate disputes. We pay two mediators per dispute \$50 each; \$100. That program is being very, very successful in helping people resolve their problems early and without going through the process of court. About 70 percent of the cases that go into that mediation program get resolved. Now, that is a very advantageous thing for the people who participate. We'd like to expand that program. We'd like to have it available right across the provincial court system, but it comes at a cost. We believe that the \$100 cost, where we're paying \$50 to each of two mediators to help assist people to solve problems in an early and effective fashion, is a very effective way of doing business. It doesn't take up expensive court time, it helps get to an effective resolution early, and it helps people deal with their problems. The other point which should be made is that when people go to small claims court, whether the filing fee is \$25 or \$100, if they're successful, they get that money back.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. My second question is also to the Minister of Justice. Given that the cost of getting justice is skyrocketing, why hasn't the minister increased the qualifying income level for receiving legal aid?

MR. HANCOCK: Well, Mr. Speaker, the qualifying income level

for receiving legal aid has gone up I believe 5 percent, so it has in fact been increased. We've recently concluded an agreement with the Law Society and the Legal Aid Society with respect to a new governance structure, which the member should probably know, and we've also increased the funding for legal aid by 25 percent over the last two years I believe it is. It could be three years. So there have been significant improvements both to the funding of legal aid, the governance of legal aid, and to the qualifying incomes.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you. My final question is also to the Minister of Justice. Why won't the minister commit to tying future fee increases to the cost of living? A 300 percent increase is quite a bit for an individual to handle.

MR. HANCOCK: I'm not sure what future fee increases the hon. member is referring to. If she's talking about future increases to Provincial Court civil claims, that hopefully is a onetime increase to deal with, as I indicated, the costs of providing mediation and other costs relating to the front end of that service. I should also mention that the hon. member indicated that there was no increase at the Court of Queen's Bench level. However, she would be wrong in that we increased the filing of a certificate of readiness at Queen's Bench rather significantly. The import of that, Mr. Speaker, is that people are again encouraged to resolve their problem through mediation prior to setting it down for trial, prior to utilizing the court's time in terms of setting aside trial time. So it was appropriate to put the fee increase at that stage rather than at the introductory stage in the Court of Queen's Bench, but there has been a significant increase at the Court of Queen's Bench.

With respect to increases in those areas, Mr. Speaker, there haven't been a great deal of increases in the court level. We do provide a high level of service and access to the public. We are doing a lot to encourage people to deal with their problems at the precourt level, which is more effective for them and certainly more cost-effective. I'm open to any ideas or suggestions that the hon. member or anyone else might have as to how we can do that more effectively and more cost-effectively for Albertans.

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

Highways 2, 7, and 547 Interchange

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are to the Minister of Transportation. Last Friday a tragic accident occurred at the intersection of highways 2, 7, and 547 near Aldersyde. The driver and her four-year-old grandson were killed. Highwood constituents are demanding timely action on the long-promised interchange at this location. To the minister: when does the Department of Transportation plan to build a safe interchange at this intersection?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. STELMACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department is responsible for about 30,000 kilometres of highway network system plus about 3,800 bridges, which would include interchanges. We support about another 135,000 kilometres of rural roads and about 8,800 bridges through municipal grants. With respect to the interchanges we of course look at the daily traffic volume and also at safety. With this particular interchange I'd like to inform the

member that we are in the process of preliminary engineering and design, which is proceeding through the normal routes within the department.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the current status of planning, land acquisition, and the cost of building this most needed intersection?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, the total cost of the interchange at this particular site is around \$20 million. We have one parcel of land in place, and we are working diligently on the other two parcels. We do have an agreement in principle, but the final agreement has not been signed as yet.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Transportation: where does this interchange fit in with the overall plans and priorities of the north/south trade corridor, which is also called the Canamex highway?

MR. STELMACH: Mr. Speaker, there are about 19 or 20 interchanges along the north/south trade corridor. That does not include at least another half a dozen on highway 16, on highway 1, one at Fort McMurray, and one at Medicine Hat that are in the planning stage. This particular interchange does rank near the top. As soon as we put all the land acquisition in place and complete others on the list that are in progress as we speak – and that's part of the north/south trade corridor along the Deerfoot Trail – of course we'll be moving with some progress on the Anthony Henday Drive, as well, and then highway 2 and highway 43 in Grande Prairie.

For-profit Diagnostic Facilities

DR. TAFT: Mr. Speaker, important research tabled earlier in this Assembly shows clearly that the greater the dominance of for-profit health care facilities, the higher the costs of public health care, including hospitals, home care, and other public programs. In Alberta for-profit health care corporations are pushing up public-sector wage expectations by offering signing bonuses, higher salaries, and easier working conditions to pull workers out of the public system. One result of this is a pronounced risk that for-profit diagnostic corporations will soon have enticed so many technicians away from some public hospitals that those hospitals will be unable to function properly. To the Minister of Health and Wellness: does the minister see any risk – any risk – that government policies are driving health care costs unnecessarily higher rather than lower?

MR. MAR: Mr. Speaker, the real issue in this debate appears not to be whether or not there are private or public providers of the service but whether it is a single or a multiple payer of the system. I think what you'll find – and I would entreat the hon. member to review the literature – is that in places where there are multiple payers, that does appear to be driving up the costs of health care. The United States and the U.K. would be good examples. But what we are working on in a made-in-Alberta solution in this province is not multiple payers. We're talking about still a single payer, but there can be a role for private providers of care within the publicly funded health care system. That is a dramatically different situation than has been portrayed by the hon. member here today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be delighted to review the evidence if the minister provides it.

What policies will the government enact to prevent for-profit diagnostic companies from creating predatory monopolies that will hold RHAs to ransom for overpriced contracts?

MR. MAR: With respect to all of the contracts that have been approved under the Health Care Protection Act, the overriding principle all along has been that we are interested in preserving the very best of our public health care system and improving access wherever possible. Mr. Speaker, in the approval of those contracts under the Health Care Protection Act, the overriding principle is: how can we improve the public system?

So, Mr. Speaker, for those members of the Alberta public or the hon. member himself if he so chooses to avail himself of the opportunity, if people wish to review such contracts as they have been approved, those contracts are available on web sites. People can see for themselves that these contracts are in fact improving access and not impairing the public health care system.

Now, with respect to the issue of diagnostics, Mr. Speaker, this may well be an opportunity for regional health authorities to contract with private providers. If private providers can provide the service faster, better, and at the same or improved cost, then that should be what happens.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some RHAs may soon have no choice but to contract with for-profit diagnostic corporations on those corporations' terms, how can the minister continue to tell this Assembly, as he just did, that diagnostic services will only be contracted out when it is faster, better, or more efficient to do so? Aren't we just putting RHAs between a rock and a hard place?

MR. MAR: Well, you know, the hon. member asked me specifically about ultrasound technicians the other day, on Thursday afternoon, April 18, issue 23, at page 788. I do have more detailed information with respect to ultrasound technicians, but as I indicated on Thursday last in this House, Mr. Speaker, the issue of trained technicians, technologists, and health care providers of all sorts is an issue not just in Alberta but across this country.

We have been very, very aggressive in our recruiting, particularly with respect to sonographers, which is what he was referring to the other day. There is a North American shortage of trained and qualified sonographers. The regional health authorities and the government are recruiting these professionals from other jurisdictions. Arrangements have been made with educational institutions in the provinces of British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia to meet with new graduates. Those interviews will take place in the month of May of this year. We've entered into a contractual arrangement with Worldwide Health Staff Associates, an international recruiting agency, to recruit sonographers from the United Kingdom. There will be attendance at the Canadian Society of Diagnostic Medical Sonographers national conference that will take place in June, 2002, for the purposes of recruitment. So we are making every effort to ensure that people are available not only for the facilities referred to by the hon. member but within the public system as well.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands, followed by the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

WCB Claims Review

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A committee of Tory MLAs recommended an independent adjudication of long-standing WCB claims by injured workers, a recommendation that was seemingly endorsed by the Minister of Human Resources and Employment, yet it seems that employers have pressured the minister into backing down on justice for injured workers. Given that employers claim that they cannot afford the adjudication process, can the minister tell the House how he expects injured workers, many of whom have been unemployed for more than a decade, to continue to bear the costs of poverty and despair as a result of the injustice that they have faced?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. member is speculating. There's no question that there is some difficulty with getting all stakeholders on the same page as it relates to how one would look at a long-term contentious claim, but I think it's a little early to be calling for the demise of that exercise.

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly not calling for the demise of the recommendations, but I'd like to know why the minister is prepared to cave in to employers when there are WCB claimants who have been waiting in some cases more than a decade for justice on their claims?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member seems to be ignoring a very fundamental fact here, and that is that the workers' compensation system as set out by the Meredith principle does talk about a system that would be funded by employers and would be there for the treatment of injured workers. As part of that principle then coming into practicality, there have to be systems that are put together to ensure that an injured worker sees and finds justice and that if the injured worker is unhappy with that particular situation, there would be an appeal system for some satisfaction, as a matter of fact even on to the Ombudsman. So we've been looking at ways to streamline that function and will continue to work toward a better system in WCB.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

2:30

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Then will the minister commit to a process that if workers are unable to get an impartial adjudication of their claims, he will bring in amendments to WCB legislation allowing these workers to seek justice in the courts?

MR. DUNFORD: Well, the member can't have it both ways, and he knows that. One of the so-called tenets, at least as I understood it, of the labour force in this province was adherence to the Meredith principle, and I'm wondering if the hon. member had thought to check with those that have supported his campaigns in the past, because I think he's just offered a very inflammatory offer during this particular question. If I appear to be stumbling a little bit, Mr. Speaker, it's because I am so shocked to hear the hon. member, you know, the socialist among socialists, even pretend that this is not a good system and to take away a system of no-fault insurance, which people like Lewis and Douglas – I mean, they must be rolling in their graves hearing a socialist like you talk about this. This is a situation. It's very serious. The Meredith principle, to which all of us are so attuned, is that there will be no lawsuit between the employee and the employer. Shame on you for suggesting it.

head: Recognitions

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

Bill Warren

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to invite all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing an Albertan who has made outstanding contributions to the Olympic movement and to Olympic ideals. Bill Warren, a key figure in Calgary's bid to host the 1988 Olympic Winter Games and a past president of the COA, received the Canadian Olympic Order on Friday, April 19, at the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame induction dinner. The Canadian Olympic Order is accorded to those individuals who have made the Olympic movement their life's work and have served it with distinction. It has only been awarded to 17 other Canadians since it was first presented in 1994. Beyond fame and fortune, Mr. Warren has dedicated a major part of his career to sports, and his success continues to inspire and encourage anyone who aspires to a dream. He complements the history of sport and has brought pride, distinction, and honour to Alberta. I encourage all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating Bill Warren on receiving the Canadian Olympic Order.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Canadian Armed Forces Reserves

MR. LUKASZUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of last week I had the distinction and honour to spend time with 1,500 men and women who are indeed the epitome of professionalism, dedication, commitment, and, above all, patriotism. These are the members of the 408 squadron and the Princess Patricia regiment now stationed in Suffield, Alberta, for training. Despite the recent adversities that we have heard of, having four of our soldiers lost, these men and women continue to be dedicated to protect our land and to keep us indeed strong and free. Do we recognize them for this effort and this commitment adequately? Sadly the answer is no. As I observed during the last three days in Suffield, we lack legislation comparable to that in the U.S. that would preserve the jobs of reservists who are deployed and have them waiting for them when they return to Canada, and many of them live in substandard conditions. Mr. Speaker, I suggest to you that all of these committed men and women deserve a collective salute from all of us and all Canadians.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member might want to read Standing Order 10.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

National Volunteer Week

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Once again I'd like to recognize National Volunteer Week, which started last Sunday, April 21, and runs to April 27. As someone who worked in the charitable nonprofit sector before being elected, I have firsthand experience with how much volunteers bring to our agencies, organizations, and groups. The theme for this year, Experience Matters, is also one I can speak to from experience. This theme highlights the skills side of volunteering. Some people volunteer to gain skills in something they haven't done before, but other volunteers like accountants or lawyers bring their skills to the sector to help out, and it is a huge help. This year's theme also speaks to varying levels of experience. In the theatres I managed, we often got

young people coming in to volunteer to see if this was an area they might like for a career, so they brought enthusiasm, energy, and a can-do attitude. Sometimes we were lucky enough to get seniors and retired folk in, who brought us a lifetime of wisdom and experience. So hug a volunteer today, and if you're a volunteer, then give yourself a pat on the back. Volunteers are the real advantage in Alberta today.

Thank you.

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

National Volunteer Week

MRS. JABLONSKI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I, too, am pleased to rise in this Assembly to recognize April 21 to 27, 2002, as Volunteer Week in Alberta. Volunteers are one of Alberta's most valued resources. Through the nationally proclaimed Volunteer Week we pay tribute recognizing the valuable and significant contribution volunteers make to our lives. Although our volunteers are priceless, contributions from the volunteer sector are estimated to be over \$1 billion to Alberta's economy annually and over \$14 billion to the national economy. This generous spirit of Albertans is an integral part of who we are and what we are celebrating this week. Through a unique partnership between the Wild Rose Foundation and Volunteer Alberta the Volunteer Week initiative has made Alberta a leader in recognizing National Volunteer Week in Canada.

This year a record number of 136 Alberta communities, including Red Deer, representing more than 2 million Albertans are participating in the weeklong series of events. This is a good example of lottery dollars at work helping to reinforce the efforts of those who through their many and diverse selfless acts enhance the quality of life for all of us. I encourage this Assembly to join me and the minister responsible for the Wild Rose Foundation in thanking all of Alberta's many wonderful volunteers.

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

Peter Lougheed

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege for me to rise today to invite all members of this Assembly to join me in recognizing the accomplishments of another outstanding Albertan for his outstanding contribution to the Olympic movement and to Olympic ideals. Former Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed, whose accomplishments otherwise are well known, has also been involved with the Olympic movement for more than three decades. For his work in this area he received the Canadian Olympic Order this past Friday at the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame induction dinner. The Canadian Olympic Order has only been given to 17 individuals who have exemplified Olympic ideals in their commitment and service to the Olympic movement and who have achieved major distinction in doing so since its inception in 1994.

Mr. Lougheed has dedicated a major part of his career over the years to promoting and organizing sporting activities, and his success at doing so continues to inspire many others who are also following their dreams and hoping to achieve similar successes. In achieving this entry into the Canadian Olympic Order, Mr. Lougheed becomes part of a very prestigious group, and I would encourage all members of this Assembly to join me in congratulating Peter Lougheed on receiving the Canadian Olympic Order.

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

Gary Bobrovitz

MR. CENAIKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize

one of my constituents, whom I've known for over 20 years, for reaching a goal of his on March 17, 2002. Gary Bobrovitz, a well-known and respected journalist and investigative reporter for *Global News* in Calgary, defended his title at the Canadian national powerlifting championships in Red Deer. Last year Gary was successful in winning the gold medal in the men's open division 60-kilogram classification, lifting over 700 pounds, or nearly five times his own body weight. This year he lifted 880 pounds, over six and a half times his own weight. Gary has qualified to move on to the world powerlifting championships in Helsinki, Finland, in November of this year. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Gary on his amazing repeat performance and wish him the best of luck in Helsinki.

Thank you.

John Ewasiw

MR. MASON: Today I stand and recognize Mr. John Ewasiw, this year's recipient of the United Way Jim Shewchuk award. This award recognizes outstanding individual contributions to the labour movement and to the community. Mr. Ewasiw's roots are pure Albertan. Born in Thorhild in 1936 and raised on the family farm, he moved to Edmonton in 1957 and worked for Swift Canadian until 1997, when he retired. He became a member of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, local 280, in 1957 and served for a number of years as the local's president. During his working days John supported his community in many ways, including the United Way, the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Edmonton and District Labour Council, and the Boys and Girls Club. He has been involved in raising funds for leukemia research since 1992 and continues to this day. I'm happy to recognize this exceptional trade unionist and Albertan, Mr. John Ewasiw.

2:40

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

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

MS GRAHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Standing Committee on Private Bills has had a certain bill under consideration and wishes to report as follows. The committee recommends that the following private bill proceed: Bill Pr. 1, Synod of the Diocese of Edmonton Amendment Act, 2002. I request the concurrence of the Assembly in this recommendation.

THE SPEAKER: Would all hon. members in favour of the report please say aye?

HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

THE SPEAKER: Opposed, please say no. The report is carried.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present a petition signed by 137 Albertans, mostly residents of Calgary, petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government "to not delist services, raise health care premiums, introduce user fees or further privatize health care."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to present a petition signed by 148 residents of Edmonton petitioning the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to urge the provincial government "to take decisive action in making safe, affordable housing a top priority of concern when making policy decisions and working with other levels of government on this issue."

head: **Introduction of Bills**

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

Bill 26

Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2002

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Workers' Compensation Amendment Act, 2002.

This bill will bring a more open and accountable workers' compensation system to Alberta and will streamline the appeals system that is so important to injured workers.

[Motion carried; Bill 26 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table today five copies of the 30th annual report of the Alberta Automobile Insurance Board, for the year ended December 31, 2001.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Seniors.

MR. WOLOSHYN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of the responses to the questions raised by Edmonton-Mill Woods and Edmonton-Centre in the presentation of my estimates on March 20.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to file with the Assembly five copies of the current issue of a magazine entitled *Canadian Government Executive*. The magazine contains a cover article profiling Ms Shirley Howe, the Acting Public Service Commissioner for the government of Alberta, and the management team behind the successful creation and implementation of a new human resources strategy for the Alberta public service. All of us in government are very proud of Ms Howe and the management team that led to the development of this strategy.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Community Development.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased to table with the Assembly today a copy of the news release that I've issued on behalf of the government of Alberta officially recognizing National Volunteer Week from April 21 to 27 and showing that a record number of 136 communities in our province are participating this year.

I also have two letters of congratulations on behalf of the govern-

ment to hon. Peter Lougheed and to Mr. Bill Warren on their being inducted into the Canadian Olympic Association Olympic Order at the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame dinner last Friday.

Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission as an agency of the government of Alberta reporting to the Minister of Health and Wellness contributes in a major way to the health of individuals, families, and communities in this province. Today it is my pleasure to table the 2002-2005 business plan of the commission, which lays out the plans of the commission for providing alcohol and other drug and gambling problems prevention, treatment, and information services to the people of Alberta over the next three years. This business plan reflects the lead role that the commission is undertaking in coordinating the implementation of the Alberta tobacco reduction strategy.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the president, Mr. Duncan Brook, of the Edmonton Gold Bar Liberal Constituency Association and on behalf of all constituency members I would like to table the report to the commission on the future of health care in Canada. This is addressed to Mr. Roy Romanow, Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada.

I also have a second tabling this afternoon. It is the WCB's proposed resolution, these cosmetic changes to the WCB, the early resolution initiative, the pilot project that was initiated on April 2 of this year. This information is available and tabled for all hon. members.

Thank you.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table five copies of an e-mail from Lynn Chambers to her MLA, the Member for Airdrie-Rocky View. She is raising her concerns about the community lottery board funding and noting that it was critical in helping Alliance Francaise achieve its goal of meeting the needs of Calgarians with an interest in French language and culture and asks her member to take immediate action to help reverse the decision.

Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table five copies of a letter from Moe Hamdon, mayor of the town of Drayton Valley, addressed to the Minister of Gaming. The letter is dated April 16. The mayor expresses his concerns and unhappiness regarding the government's decision to eliminate the community lottery board program because it undermines the survival of many voluntary organizations and contravenes the government's original undertaking to return a significant portion of gaming revenues to local communities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling five copies of a calendar of events which lists the various events celebrating the

May week labour festival taking place in Edmonton from Friday, April 26, to Sunday, May 5.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 18, it is my pleasure to move that written questions appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of written questions 3 and 4.

[Motion carried]

Access Television

Q3. Ms Blakeman moved on behalf of Mr. MacDonald that the following question be accepted.

How many government departments have provided or sponsored in part or in full programs, shows, advertisements, or other initiatives for use on Access Television, how many were there for each department, and what was the cost of each for each of the fiscal years 1992-1993 to 2000-2001 and April 1, 2001, to March 13, 2002?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Finance.

MRS. NELSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It would be very difficult for the government to produce the information that has been requested in this written question without extensive manual work on a ministry-by-ministry basis. In fact, answering the question would require a review of the details of every single payment made by a ministry to Access over the last 10 years. This information is available through the general revenue fund for 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 by department and expenditure code for payments to Access but not in the detail requested. For earlier years the only available information is contained in the general revenue fund details of expenditure by payee, which we used to refer to as the blue book. It's tabled each year in the House.

Rejection of this written question is based on *Beauchesne* 446(2)(g), which states that "papers of a voluminous character or which would require an inordinate cost or length of time to prepare" should be exempt from production. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I'd refer the hon. members opposite to what was called the blue book for that data. Unfortunately, we will have to reject this request for Written Question 3.

2:50

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm disappointed to hear that a refusal is the response from the hon. Treasurer. I understand the citation that she referred to, looking for a voluminous amount of material, but I am a little concerned when I see a request coming from the opposition for information that is then declined because it would just be too much work to try and find it. I think that certainly from this side what we've experienced in the past is that we ask nicely by letter; we don't get it. We try and ask through a written question or a motion for a return; we don't get it. Then we FOIP it, and everybody's all surprised and hurt because we FOIPed it and why we didn't just ask nicely in the first place. So trying to get information out of this government, which is not open and

transparent, is very difficult. This is another example of their having the information and not being willing to compile it for us.

I think this is a reasonable question. The government divested itself of interest or ownership in Access Television a few years ago, but it does appear that it's still providing support for programming, and I think that it's quite a reasonable question to find out how much support is coming from the government. Obviously, it's coming from different departments. Certainly there's sponsorship from various departments that I've seen at the beginning or the end of programs on Access. I felt that it was a reasonable question to be asking, how much government support was still going through. So once again it's very disappointing how little information this government is willing to provide to people that ask reasonable questions of it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 3 lost]

Police Services Agreement

Q4. Ms Blakeman moved that the following question be accepted.

How many provincial policing positions has the government funded for each of the fiscal years 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and April 1, 2001, to March 13, 2002, through the provincial police services agreement, and how many of these positions were filled?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Yes. Thank you. The government is prepared to accept Written Question 4 with some amendments, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Forsyth moved that Written Question 4 be amended to move that the following question be accepted:

How many provincial policing officers has the government funded for each of the fiscal years 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 and projected for 2001-2002 through the provincial police services agreement, and what was the authorized number of officers for each of those years?

The original question is unanswerable for the following reasons. It is based on the assumption that government funds a set number of positions through the provincial police services agreement, while in reality the government establishes a target authorizing the establishment of full-time equivalent, or FTE, officers but pays only for the actual average establishment. Because staffing is fluid with the continual movement of persons into and out of positions, actual FTEs calculated as an average over a period of time, for example a fiscal period, is used to monitor policing strength. This is a more accurate method of determining funding requirements than positions. The term "officers" is used to indicate full-time equivalents. The actual FTE utilization for the period April 1, 2001, to March 31, 2002, is not yet available. Instead, a projection will be used.

Mr. Speaker, the government will accept the question with the amendments as circulated to all members.

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

MS BLAKEMAN: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'll take this as a genuine effort from the Solicitor General to provide information. I find it frustrating, though. The specificity of the language was therefore a reason I was seeking information on how many positions the government thought they were funding and whether in fact the positions were filled. What I'm hearing from some people is that a given detachment may have 12 positions that are supposed to have

officers in them, but in fact one of them is out on WCB and two are off on stress leave and two of them were native policing. So the actual number of officers that are available in that detachment is far fewer than is on the books, so to speak, and there was a suspicion that there was a growing gap between what was on the books and what was actually rubber on the road. That was some of the information I was seeking.

As I have said before, it's very difficult to get information out of this government. [interjection] I look forward to the time when I can have the Minister of Environment as my minister, and then I'm sure he'll be able to provide all the information I'm seeking. However, he's not the minister that I'm dealing with at this time.

So I will accept not gratefully but begrudgingly the amount of information that is being made available to me and hope that I can encourage the Solicitor General to continue to be forthcoming, even to expand her forthcomingness in the future.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 4 as amended carried]

head: Motions for Returns

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Thursday, April 18, it is my pleasure to move that motions for returns appearing on today's Order Paper do stand and retain their places with the exception of Motion for a Return 1.

[Motion carried]

Police Services Agreement

M1. Ms Blakeman moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents prepared by or for the Department of Justice and Attorney General and the Department of Solicitor General between April 1, 1999, and March 1, 2002, providing the number of provincial police positions funded by the government under the provincial police services agreement and the number of positions filled under that agreement.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Solicitor General.

MRS. FORSYTH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is prepared to accept MR 1, again with amendments, sir.

Mrs. Forsyth moved that Motion for a Return 1 be amended to read that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of documents prepared by the Department of Justice and Attorney General and the Department of Solicitor General for the fiscal years 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002 providing the number of provincial police officers funded or projected by the government under the provincial police services agreement and the number of officers authorized under that agreement for each of the fiscal years.

The original motion for a return should be amended for the following reasons. Summary documents prepared by the government of Alberta for payment reconciliation should be used rather than complex documents provided by a third party, who may have objections to details being released publicly. Because the established authorized and actual FTEs are reviewed and reconciled on an annual basis, separate information for the fiscal years 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002 would be more meaningful and in keeping with the corresponding written question than trying to

combine the years. Because staffing is fluid with the continual movement of persons into and out of positions, full-time equivalents as represented by the word “officers” provides a more accurate and meaningful measure than “positions.”

The fiscal reconciliation for the period April 1, 2001, to March 31, 2002, is not yet available. Instead, a projection will be proposed. Under the provincial police services agreement the government funds the actual number of officers. It would be more meaningful to compare the actual with the authorized number of officers, FTEs.

Mr. Speaker, I'll move that MR 1 be accepted with the amendments.

MS BLAKEMAN: My response to this proposed amendment to MR 1 brought forward by the Solicitor General is very similar to my statements in response to Written Question 4, so I can refer any reader back in *Hansard* to read that. Essentially I was looking for information that's going to detail for us whether we actually had officers filling the positions we thought we had and exactly what they were doing, because there is a suspicion that we don't have as many officers out there doing the work – in other words, policing or law enforcement – that we think we do. Particularly, in one case I had someone approach me with a concern that an officer had been seconded around September 11. [interjection] Yes, 9-11. So I was looking for information about whether or not that in fact was happening. So I appreciate the Solicitor General coming forward in an attempt to provide me with information, and I'm willing to accept the amendment to Motion for a Return 1.

3:00

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Solicitor General, the chair heard the hon. Solicitor General speak to the amendment. It would be helpful if the hon. Solicitor General moved the amendment as well.

MRS. FORSYTH: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry; I thought I had. I move the amendment.

[Motion for a Return 1 as amended carried]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 206
Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002**

[Adjourned debate April 15: Mrs. Fritz]

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne.

MR. VANDERBURG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour and a privilege to join in on the debate on Bill 206, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The words “careful” and “control” came to mind when I thought about Bill 206. We've heard debate about the need to control the population of predatory birds in order to effectively preserve fish populations in Alberta lakes. The sponsor has described the behaviour of the double-crested cormorant and how birds have decimated lakes in northern Alberta. You know, the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul knows more about the negative effects of this bird than anyone else in this House, and I would agree with other members in this Assembly about the need to control this bird that's

obviously causing great harm to our aquaculture and environment.

Things are getting out of hand, and it's time for government to find a solution, Mr. Speaker. The challenge for this government is to act in a serious and sensible way while fulfilling our roles as protectors of both the Alberta environment and Alberta business. The remedy proposed in Bill 206 is to allow the minister responsible for the Fisheries (Alberta) Act to use existing legislation, the Agricultural Pests Act, to control this bird species that is destroying and harming fish habitat. The bill is not suggesting drastic measures, nor is it suggesting anything new. The Agricultural Pests Act currently provides the legal authority to deal with native and introduced pests affecting agriculture production.

Mr. Speaker, the beauty and usefulness of Alberta's lakes will be here as long as the people of Alberta and this government are willing to show careful regard for the environment. Bill 206 does just that. I would encourage all members of this Assembly to support this important legislation.

Thank you.

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

MR. BONNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon and make some comments on Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul.

Certainly the growth in the population of cormorants over the last decade has been incredible in this province, but before we rush forward and pass a bill such as Bill 206, I think that what we need are some type of quantitative studies which are going to certainly point out exactly why this phenomenon has occurred, particularly when we see that for so many years in this province that population was stable, yet in recent years it has grown, and grown rapidly. I think what we're seeing here today as well, Mr. Speaker, is that a number of people in this province have looked at this issue, and as the hon. Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne has just indicated, they see these birds as a problem. I think we have to go much further than to just look at the reason why these birds are now considered to be a problem.

I had the opportunity a few summers ago to go to Namur Lake, which is a trophy lake. You have to fly in from Fort McMurray. Those people have been managing that lake for a number of years, and they certainly saw the impact of the cormorant on particularly the arctic grayling, which were at one particular end of the lake and certainly in the creeks and whatever, and how those populations had been wiped out. We also have to look at not only those populations that had been drastically reduced, but we have to look at the fish populations, for example, of northern pike and walleye. These populations were stable in the province for many, many years, but with the growth in the number of fishermen and the limited number of lakes that we do have in this province, the populations of northern pike and walleye have certainly decreased.

Of course, that compounds the problem in that smaller fish in the lake and minnows and whatever increase in great numbers when they are further down the food line and their predators have decreased significantly in numbers. There was a tremendous amount of food available to birds like cormorants. There were at one time healthy populations of northern pike and walleye. So these small forage fish certainly grew in incredible numbers. The food supply was increased, and the bird populations obviously followed suit.

Now, then, I don't believe that passing a bill like 206 is going to take care of this problem over time. What we have to do, Mr. Speaker, is certainly restore the fish populations, particularly of

northern pike and walleye. Just as this problem has arisen over time, to correct this problem and to correct it properly is also going to take a significant amount of work and dedication. It is very, very difficult to monitor field inventories on these popular game fish and fish populations and to also notice the trends when over the last decade we have had significant decreases in the funding of the two departments that are most responsible for our fish populations in this province, and those are Sustainable Resource Development and Environment.

What this is is simply crisis management. When we get to the stage that we introduce a private member's bill to deal with this significant problem, yet when we go through the departments of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, we certainly don't see any mention of this problem, we don't see any additional funds that have been allocated to take care of this, then I know that I cannot support Bill 206. As this problem has developed over the last decade, then I think that we have to look forward and institute the proper strategies so that nature itself can take care of this problem. If it hadn't been for the overfishing by people in this province, we wouldn't be experiencing this problem right now and nature would be able to handle the situation very well.

3:10

As I was mentioning, Mr. Speaker, one of the keys that we have to have always in place in this province is that we monitor accurately the status of our aquatic resources. As well, we have to reinvest into those aquatic resources, we have to rely on a long-term monitoring program of our fish populations, and we also have to look at the fish habitats, including not only water quantity but water quality. I think that if we are looking not for a quick fix to a problem and certainly something that there are no guarantees for, a solution that is not nature itself that is in control but man, then I think what we have to do is that we have to restore the aquatic resources in our budget, the number of dollars that we're going to spend, and certainly look at how these resources have been eroded over the years in year after year of decreases to this particular budget.

We have to put in strategies here that are going to reverse this whole increase in the cormorant population. We have to put in strategies that are going to restore the healthy numbers of walleye and northern pike in our northern lakes, and by doing this, we can certainly reduce the number of small forage fish that the cormorant feeds on. But the quickest way and long-term solution for this is to certainly eliminate or drastically reduce that source of food that these birds rely on.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will not be voting in favour of Bill 206. I think it's a band-aid solution, and I think the problem is much greater than what this bill will fix. I think that as an Assembly our duty is to look at solutions which are long term. We have to look at solutions where our fish populations are sustainable, and if it takes another decade for nature to correct this problem itself with some help of ours, whether it's introducing these types of game fish, the northern pike and walleye into these lakes, then certainly it is incumbent upon us to look at those solutions and certainly not the crisis solution of killing off these birds.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

MR. SNELGROVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 206. I think this is really one of the examples where the Legislative Assembly can work properly. When a member from an area or region comes into this Assembly with a

very clear and specific problem and has worked with the departments to develop a solution to a problem and can present that in a very timely and affordable manner to the people of Alberta, then I think surprisingly enough, occasionally, like I say, even a blind squirrel finds an acorn.

What the member has asked the minister to do is:

When the minister determines that a species of animal or bird is destroying or harming, or is likely to destroy or harm, fish or fish habitat, the Minister may order, in accordance with any guidelines adopted by regulation, such measures throughout Alberta or in part of Alberta that the Minister deems necessary to protect the fish or fish habitat which may include reducing the numbers of that species of animal or bird on land owned by the Crown.

That's a very simple, straightforward request that says: here's a serious problem; let's fix it.

Now, we target fish as one of the species at risk here, but that's part of the big plan. We can't just say that it's fish for the sake of someone going to fish. They're part of an ecosystem – I know even our hon. members across would agree – that is a very important part of the big picture. So we could sit, Mr. Speaker, and we could do some more studies, and we could monitor, and we could count numbers, and we could let the lakes in Alberta die. Then we would all say, "Man, we should have done something," but we were busy counting and taking numbers and doing studies.

We see a very good example of this. They say: "Well, that wouldn't happen. How could normal people do that?" Let's look at what's happened in the north with the snow geese. The numbers of snow geese have increased so far past what the land is able to handle that they have destroyed the Arctic tundra for miles and miles and miles, and given the growing season in the north it won't be in any of our lifetimes that this ever comes back.

Now, the federal government, as they can do, will study, and they will count birds, and they will say: boy, we've got a problem there, but as long as we have money to count and to study and no one lives right there, then it's not a big problem. Even the Alberta fish and wildlife people recognize that, and they've upped the limit of snow geese you can shoot, but I guess they should make it mandatory maybe that you have to shoot 50 of them before you shoot a Canada goose. I don't know what the answer is, but the answer certainly isn't doing nothing.

There's another very good example right now going on in Chesapeake Bay, Mr. Speaker, where a type of swan is doing an incredible amount of damage to the reeds and grass along the edge of the Chesapeake Bay. Given the nature of water movement there, it's a very dangerous precedent to set, to start to erode the banks. It's not just the animals that live near the banks, but it affects all of them. Now, it would be simple if the swan was an ugly thing that people didn't care for much. You could probably go destroy it and people wouldn't mind, but a swan is a beautiful creature, and we're all supposed to love it. Still, the fish and wildlife people there have put forward a plan, that's already been approved, to spray the eggs with an oil-based solvent that won't let the eggs hatch, so it's pretty painless. It makes the birds think they're doing a heck of a job, but there are just not going to be as many birds in the future.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's slippery to sit on them, though.

MR. SNELGROVE: Yes. If they oiled them first, they'd probably be easier to have.

Mr. Speaker, here's a case where certainly we have the environmentalists on one side saying: "Boy, we can't do this. We can't mess with nature." We're the biggest part in nature now. Unfortunately, we destroy nature every day, and we're not going to go back, but the least we can do when we recognize a very clear and present

danger to a species or a chain is step in and help where we can.

So I would say to the Assembly that we can study and we can watch and we can listen to the people who aren't up there to see the disaster that's coming from these cormorants, but as far as I'm concerned, we should get on with the matter at hand and the sooner the better. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. TAFT: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I rise with an open mind on this issue, as remarkable as that may seem. I can see both sides or maybe many sides to the issue, and I at the moment am not clear where I'm going to come down on it, but I do find myself trying to put this issue in a bigger debate.

I'm sure all members of the Assembly are aware of the collapse of fish stocks actually worldwide. We're all aware in Canada of the collapse of the fish stocks in the Newfoundland Grand Banks. When I was a schoolboy, I was taught that the Grand Banks of Newfoundland were virtually an inexhaustible supply of fish, yet they're gone. In fact, when you look at that in a global term, there are fish stocks around the world that are collapsing off the coasts of every continent. The major fish stocks are collapsing, and we are seeing the same kind of thing with freshwater fish stocks in Alberta and I'm sure in other jurisdictions. There have been repeated references in this Assembly by the hon. Member for Athabasca-Wabasca to the collapse in various fisheries. I know from my own experience and experience of my family that going out to fish for something as simple as jackfish is now difficult to do. I mean, you used to be able to catch jackfish. Even I could catch a jackfish, and that's really saying something. Now it's hard for anybody to catch jackfish in many lakes in this province.

3:20

What we're looking at here is a global problem with our fish stocks. As much as cormorants may be a problem in some lakes in Alberta, I can't imagine that they're the cause of the demise of fish stocks around the world. I don't think in the big picture that killing cormorants is going to be any kind of long-term solution to the problem we're seeing.

I think we need to look at other or further solutions, and those solutions may have to do with our whole approach to the habitat: our handling of the lands through which the rivers flow and in which the lakes are formed, the way we handle the lands around the edges of the lakes and the riverbanks, the amount of encroachment we allow on this land from industry or residential development or agriculture, the kinds of chemicals that are produced in our society that get into the water supply. All kinds of issues affect the welfare of our fish stocks, and again I repeat that I can't believe for a minute that cormorants are the main cause of the problems in the lakes that we're discussing.

On the other hand, I listened carefully to the comments from the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and his plea for action, and I think of comments I hear for plea for action on a whole host of issues, whether it's climate change or other environmental issues. I think there's much to be said for acting, so that draws me to support the bill, but I know I'm not alone in having my concerns.

The whole issue of how we as a society and how this government manage fish stocks comes into this. Are our fish and wildlife resources adequate? By that, I mean the department: the inspectors, the biologists, the policy managers. Are there enough of them to sufficiently manage the fish and wildlife of this province so that they don't become extinct or they don't disappear? I am concerned that

there's a direct correlation between the decline in fish stocks in this province and cuts to the staffing and budgets of the departments that are supposed to manage those stocks. So it may be that it's not the cormorants' fault; it's the Treasurer's fault, for example. But she's not going to respond to that, so I'll just pass it on.

It may be that there are other causes that we should be looking at and that the cormorants are in fact simply a symptom of a larger problem. The surging cormorant population may in fact result from the collapse of fish populations such as the northern pike population or the Walleye population. With those sport fish being fished out, it may be that the forage fish population has surged and they've provided a much more attractive feeding source for the cormorants, so the cormorants are coming in after the fact. That's one possibility. We may be treating a symptom rather than a cause. So it would be useful for me if the member sponsoring this bill were to present the larger context in terms of what's really happening. Is this really the cormorants' fault, or is this something much bigger?

There are also questions around how this Bill 206 might be implemented and how it might be managed. Would we keep track, for example, of the cormorant population over the years that the bill was enacted? Would we have some kind of objective or goal for the number of cormorants that were acceptable? Would we have an annual cormorant count on the lakes? I got a smile from one of the members, but actually, you know, we'd probably need something like that to know if we were having a successful campaign and to know when to stop killing cormorants. I suppose there's even the question of the public image of people going out to kill cormorants or to destroy the eggs of cormorants. Indeed, are we going to be destroying the food source for certain types of small wildlife if we destroy the eggs? Are we for example going to be starving foxes or muskrat or other creatures who might feed on those eggs? I have no idea. Maybe the hon. member does.

MR. BONNER: We need to increase our forage fish.

DR. TAFT: Yes. Might we see in fact a great surge in the forage fish in the lakes once the cormorants are gone, and what are going to be the implications of that? Maybe they'll be great. Maybe we'll see a surge, a return of the jackfish population and the walleye population, but on the other hand we might see the ecological balance of the lake thrown totally out of whack. Maybe the cormorants are there filling an important role for nature, a kind of stopgap measure for nature.

So those are some of the questions I have at this point, Mr. Speaker. I'm undecided about where I will vote on this particular piece of legislation. I think the hon. member's intentions are admirable. I doubt if he bears a grudge against cormorants. He's simply interested in improving the health of our lakes, but I'm not sure that this is the mechanism through which we want to do that. So I'll listen with interest to the other members' comments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASKELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege for me also to rise today to speak to Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002, sponsored by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. For a very long time my only experience having to do with cormorants – and I've had this great affection for China for many years – was in my reading and hearing about these wonderful fishing birds they had in China. They put a ring around their neck, and they tossed them out of the boat with a rope tied to their leg, and

they went down and caught fish for the family and brought them up and so on. I never thought I would be rising in the Alberta Legislature to speak on an issue about cormorants. What I'm going to be speaking about today really is my personal experience, which perhaps many of you haven't had insofar as cormorants are concerned.

A number of years ago I bought a farm out in the Sangudo area.

MR. VANDERBURG: Is that Whitecourt-St. Anne?

MR. MASKELL: Out in Whitecourt-St. Anne on the bluffs overlooking the Pembina valley. It was a wonderful place to bring my family. I brought my grandchildren and nieces and nephews there to have a great adventure. Well, their great adventure was to get a video and go in and watch it while they're at the farm. Needless to say, it got me a little agitated, so I thought: you know, wouldn't it be great to put a trout pond in? It could generate some revenue with aquaculture, fish farming, and at the same time give my grandchildren something to do in catching fish. So I went through the whole process of getting the licensing and permissions that were required, had the pond created and filled it and so on. Then when it was time, I ordered the fish to be delivered and got 500 fingerling trout put into the pond. We had great fun throwing the fish food out on the pond and watching all these little fingerlings coming up to seek the food, but a couple of weeks after I had stocked this pond, my brother phoned and said: "Bro, you've got a big problem out there. Birds are flying in, and your fish are disappearing quickly." They were like a swarm of grasshoppers, which we're familiar with, the way they came in. Well, I can tell you that within a week I had no trout left in my pond.

3:30

Well, I'm not a very good loser on things like that, so I thought, "Doggone it all; I'm going to have those trout in that pond for my grandchildren." So I ordered another 500 trout and had them delivered. I had phoned all the right people, who were going to tell me how I could thwart the cormorants and not have this problem. So on the pier I built a scarecrow, and he looked mighty frightening, this human kind of scarecrow, standing on the pier. Well, that didn't work very well. All I did was provide another perch for the cormorants to land on. Then the fish and wildlife people, all the great experts that we had there, with all due respect, said: "No. You put a raft on the pond, and then you put the scarecrow on the raft." So now the raft floated around and so on, and now we provided another perch for the cormorants to land on: the raft and the scarecrow. So that didn't work well.

So, again, not to lose out on this, I decided to take the next step. These authorities said: "No. Now we've got to take the next step with propane guns." So all these guns were firing all the time. Well, that helped for a few hours or so, but again it didn't seem to affect the birds at all, and the neighbours were getting a little cranky about the propane guns that were firing continuously. Needless to say, I had a lot of visitors to the pond from the area and lots of advice and also people telling me that they had never seen these cormorants before I created this pond.

MR. DANYLUK: Oh, so you started it.

MR. MASKELL: Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, it's not my fault, honestly.

So finally they said: "Okay. Those three things don't work. Now, this will definitely work. You string wire back and forth across the pond. You put spinning reflectors on it and flags and so on." So, I

mean, my family went to great trouble to create this. Well, it made it a little difficult for them to come sliding in and land on the pond, so all they did was land on the grass and walk in and then catch my fish. So I surrendered for that year and then tried the following year and had much the same experience.

What I quickly discovered was that this certainly is not unique to the area. The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul was talking about in the northeast it being a problem and in central Alberta also and in our area stretching from Barrhead to Lake Isle. People were putting fish ponds – even in the farmyard. Mine was a quarter of a mile away from the house, but right in the farmyard these birds will land and clean out the pond. You could sit there day and night, and they'd find a way to get your fish.

So in terms of aquaculture and creating fish ponds to raise these fish, that didn't work at all. But the lakes around the area also suffered significantly. The lakes that had natural fish stocks for many years were being quickly cleaned out. In some of the smaller lakes the bird population was so large that the vegetation, the trees and so on around the lakes, was being killed from the bird droppings and so on. Stocked lakes in the area of course didn't survive the problems that we had.

So it's a matter that these birds were not known in the region at all for many, many years, and now they've just about cleaned out the area. I've done some research on this, and we've heard over and over and over that Alberta fish populations are at low levels. Pike catches – jackfish, as the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview speaks about – are only 15 percent of what they were in 1970. Of the 27 walleye populations for which there is data, 21 have collapsed in recent years. Concurrent to fish population collapse over the past 30 years, cormorant populations have increased tenfold. Commercial and sportfishing, not including tourism spin-off industries, contribute over \$1 billion to the Alberta economy. So active management of fishery resources to promote long-term sustainability of the industry would increase the economic stability and growth in northern Alberta.

Bill 206 would enable the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development, responsible for Alberta fish and wildlife, to ensure that fish farmers have an effective recourse and protection of their property from pests. Under Bill 206 the spawning routes of all fish species would be facilitated. This would increase the population of fish naturally and thereby reduce the necessity for expensive restocking measures. The proactive management of waterfowl populations would prevent waterfowl fecal pollution of potable water sources and habitats for protected bird species such as the great blue heron, the American white pelican, or the whooping and sandhill cranes.

Bill 206, Mr. Speaker, allows for a very broad approach to fish population recovery strategies and is not limited to depredation of cormorants or other pests. I plead with members: please, please support Bill 206.

Thank you very much.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Dunvegan.

MR. GOUDREAU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and add my voice to the debate on Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002. I would like to thank the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul for his efforts in bringing this legislation forward. The Alberta fisheries industry is something that does not receive enough attention or discussion, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to discuss it here. I would like to talk about the benefits of the proposed legislation and then move on to why I think passing Bill 206 is important.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation aims to enable fish farmers to protect their investment from pest species of nongame birds. It will also set up a framework that would allow the Alberta fish population to grow on its own. The legislation will permit proactive and protective actions by fish farmers.

First, Bill 206 will allow the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to control factors that hinder the growth of the fish population. Predatory bird populations could be reduced, and improved spawning routes could be ensured through the constructive removal of natural barriers such as beaver dams. Second, Bill 206 will allow the minister of agriculture to declare certain species of nongame birds as pests to aquaculture, or fish farming. With this legislation in place fish farmers will have the ability to protect their investment through lethal methods without obtaining a depredation order from the department. If it is passed, Bill 206 will enable fish farmers to act swiftly to protect their livelihood without having to wade patiently through the existing channels while their investments get eaten up one by one. These amendments to these two acts will work together to establish guiding principles by which the Department of Sustainable Resource Development can ensure the viability and protection of Alberta's fish stocks and biodiversity of Alberta's lakes and aquatic ecosystems.

Bill 206 is an important step towards a goal of long-term, viable fishing resources in Alberta. When compared to Ontario, B.C., and Manitoba, it can be truly said that Alberta is a province with few lakes. Because we have a small number of lakes, Alberta has a comparatively small commercial and tourist fishing industry. However, commercial and sportfishing, excluding tourism and spin-off benefits, contribute over \$1 billion to the Alberta economy. A billion dollars is no small sum, and when tourist dollars are included and the total economic impact is assessed, I think that we could all agree that this is an industry that could use a measure of legislative help.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta fishing industry and our recreational fishing have suffered from a population explosion of unchecked predators and other natural, limiting factors. Our fish populations are presently at dangerously low levels, and as our Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark indicated, pike catches have declined 85 percent from the level fishermen enjoyed 30 years ago. Also, data reports that three-quarters of the walleye populations in Alberta have met with severe decline over the same period. We have all heard that a bad day fishing beats a good day at the office, but with statistics on fish stocks like these, it's hard to imagine too many good days' fishing. And I had chalked it up to really bad bait all this time.

In response to this problem, Alberta has attempted to bolster the fish population in our lakes several times over the last 25 years. The restocking of Alberta lakes that has occurred has met with little success; hence the repeated attempts that have been made. Depleted stocks have persisted despite restocking efforts due to several factors including overfishing, inadequate spawning routes, winterkill in shallow ponds, and overwhelming shorebird presence. Bill 206 will give the Department of Sustainable Resource Development a mandate to attempt to effectively prevent and manage the responsible factors that have created the fish stock problems in this province. If the department is able to re-establish and secure routes for fish spawning and prevent overfishing, then a large portion of the problem can be solved.

However, these steps will not rectify the problems that certain lakes and fishing areas are facing. Northern Alberta fishermen and fish farmers are all familiar with a winged predator that mercilessly

guts fish stocks in lakes, streams, and dugouts. The double-crested cormorant is a bird that is native to lakes in northern Alberta. The bird is awkward in the air but is a skilled fisherman. Cormorants have natural predators, namely rats and large snakes. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, northern Alberta is not hospitable to large snakes, and as we all know, Alberta is a rat-free province. This has left the cormorant with no natural predators.

Before the 1970s the population of cormorants was controlled inadvertently by the use of DDT. When the decision-makers of the day came to the realization that this pesticide was harmful to the ecosystem, there was a ban put on its use. While banning this pesticide was without question a necessary and positive step for the provincial environment, it did allow the cormorants to flourish. At about the same time, the government of the day undertook steps to restock the fish supplies in this province and provided the cormorants with a bounty of food. Ironically, and by no coincidence, Mr. Speaker, each restocking has led to a dramatic increase in the population of cormorants. The provincial population of cormorants is now 10 times higher than it was 25 years ago, and I believe that a direct link can be made to the restocking efforts that have been made over the past three decades.

I think it is time that we put an initiative in place to allow Alberta's fish population to grow, and it would seem to me that a great way to help achieve this is through the sensible removal of an unyielding and unchecked predator. The current methods of warding off winged predators could be enhanced by the measures proposed in Bill 206. Taking legislative action to protect our limited fisheries from natural predators is a valuable first step in the strengthening of Alberta's recreational fishing and Alberta's fish farms.

Mr. Speaker, an easy comparison can be drawn between the way that fish farmers feel about cormorants and the way that our farmers feel about gophers: they are small in stature, travel in generally large groups, and hinder the human ability to achieve maximum effectiveness in our farming endeavors. It is no coincidence that Bill 206 will allow cormorants to be listed as the same type of pest as the gopher in the eyes of the provincial laws. Farmers have the right to eliminate gopher populations on their property with lethal means in order to protect their investment. Under Bill 206 fish farmers in the province will have the ability to also eliminate cormorants through any means to protect their investment. On fish farms the investment is ripe pickings for fish-preying birds like cormorants. The fruits of the farmer's labour are nestled in shallow pools, waiting to be plucked off by hunting birds. It is not right to prevent the proprietors of these farms from protecting their investment in the same way that other agricultural farmers in this province have been able to protect their lands from certain pests.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, taking active management of fisheries resources will undoubtedly promote the long-term sustainability of the fishing industry in Alberta and would increase its economic stability and growth in the north. The proposed legislation allows for a broad approach to fish population recovery strategies and is not limited to depredation only. With this legislation in place, the spawning routes of all fish species will be facilitated and preserved. In conjunction with the facilitation of spawning routes, the means that Bill 206 makes available for fish farmers to use to protect their stock will help increase the fish population naturally and thereby eliminate the need for expensive restocking strategies.

I would strongly urge my fellow members of this Assembly to lend their support to Bill 206 and to the fish farmers of Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to join the intense debate regarding Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002, which has been introduced by my distinguished colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul. At this time I wish to express my gratitude to my colleague for bringing this important issue before the House.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 206 is intended to correct a problem that has adversely affected the aquatic ecosystem in Alberta for many years. With lakes, rivers, and creeks found in every corner of the province, many Albertans are directly affected by negative changes to fish populations and our aquaculture. In the last 30 years a major collapse in fish population has occurred, while at the same time the population of a particular bird species, the cormorant, has flourished throughout the province. Now, I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview thinks that this may just be a coincidence, but the double-crested cormorant is a bird species that consumes up to a pound of fish on a daily basis. This bird is a very skilled predator of small fish and has the ability to severely deplete fish stocks in lakes and other bodies of water with overwhelming efficiency.

Bill 206 aims to empower fish farmers to protect their investment and in turn their livelihoods from this and other identified pest species. Further, Bill 206 will allow the Department of Sustainable Resource Development to develop a mechanism designed specifically to ensure sustainability, biological diversity, and viability of fish farming. This will help protect the aquaculture in Alberta for years to come and will help people like the hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark as well.

Since the Department of Sustainable Resource Development is responsible for Alberta fish and wildlife, it is their responsibility to maintain a healthy environment in which aquafarmers can protect their property from pests that unnecessarily damage their investment and the environment. Since certain bird species and more specifically the cormorant have expanded their habitats dramatically during the last three decades, they have placed severe pressure on Alberta's fish population. While fish farmers and environmental groups are working feverishly to maintain our aquaculture in good shape, the cormorant and other pest bird species are working even harder on depleting our fish population to dangerous levels.

Our province serves as an especially suitable habitat for the cormorant. As you heard, there are no natural predators that are present in Alberta to control their populations. Snakes and rats are the two major predators that help keep the cormorant in check in other jurisdictions. As we all know, there are no rats in Alberta, and snakes are also in very short supply, especially in northern Alberta, and I am very glad to say that it is so, Mr. Speaker. Further, many Alberta lakes are relatively shallow, and since the cormorant can dive up to 40 feet, many fish have nowhere to hide. Thanks to Bill 206 we will finally provide the tools necessary for our fish farmers and the Department of Sustainable Resource Development to control the cormorant and other bird species that have grown out of control.

In addition, an important point to make is that commercial and sportfishing, not including tourism and spin-off industries, contribute over \$1 billion to the Alberta economy. Many Albertans enjoy their time spent fishing and angling on the many pristine lakes and rivers around our great province. With many lakes suffering from substantially reduced fish stocks, the fish farmers, aquaculturists, and fishing enthusiasts are finding it increasingly harder to find adequate sources of fish in Alberta's lake and river system. Now, Mr. Speaker, it is especially difficult for those of us who are not great fishermen to begin with. By providing reasonable and effective legislation, we can ensure that certain pest species are controlled at levels that allow for environmental harmony.

3:50

As many Albertans work to restock the fish population in our lakes and rivers, certain bird species expand in numbers accordingly and effectively counteract those restocking efforts. Bird predation is among the leading causes of fish loss at commercial aquaculture facilities. Mr. Speaker, the Agricultural Pests Act, which is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, allows farmers and ranchers to proactively manage species that threaten their stock as long as it has been determined a pest by the minister. The Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002, would work in much the same way to protect our fish population from nonthreatened, nongame birds. Certain pest species have gone unchecked for too long, and legislation is badly needed to correct the problems they are causing. There are major environmental and economic implications to this issue, and unfortunately the double-crested cormorant is at the centre of most of it.

I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul for having the strength, Mr. Speaker, to deal with this issue. Even though the pesky bird problem is a very important one, Bill 206 also deals with other challenges that currently hamper a healthy development of our fish populations and fish farming operations. By providing adequate spawning routes, we will facilitate the natural ability of fish stocks to develop. This can be maintained by proactively removing beaver dams that pose a problem for certain fish species' migration. Bill 206 would also help farmers deal with problematic beaver dams when appropriate. The facilitation of spawning waters will help increase the fish population naturally, which will also reduce the need for restocking measures that often carry substantial additional costs.

The legislation proposed under Bill 206 is not designed to eliminate the cormorant species or any other predatory bird species in Alberta. It is designed to serve as a tool that fish farmers throughout Alberta have at their disposal to deal with pests that threaten their property and livelihood.

Finally, Bill 206 will address the issue of the management of sport and commercial fishing licences to promote sustainable harvesting of the fishery resource. This part of the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002, is necessary to ensure that we can maintain a healthy fish population in areas most affected by overfishing, which has to be named as one of the culprits to the degradation of Alberta's fish population. Bill 206 would require the minister, through Alberta fish and wildlife, to evaluate Alberta's aquatic ecosystems and provide effective solutions to problems that are affecting the fishing industry throughout the province.

Further, Bill 206 provides a broad framework that will serve as the foundation for effective stock recovery strategies. Only a broad and flexible approach will ensure that we do what's best for Alberta's fish populations, the fishing industry, tourists, and aquatic ecosystems as a whole. We have a serious problem on our hands, Mr. Speaker, and it requires serious action on our part. Bill 206 provides adequate legislation to allow those involved to be better equipped to deal with the issue as necessary.

Mr. Speaker, as I voice my strong support for Bill 206, I wish to encourage all my colleagues as well as those on the opposite side of the House to support it as well. Thank you.

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

MR. MASYK: Thank you very much. We hear a lot of reports of people who are not so good at fishing and who do not have the ability to catch fish. Mr. Speaker, I'm a great fisherman, and I have trouble catching fish. So when a fisherman goes out for recreation

and the cormorants are lapping up all the fish, the recreation fisherman isn't going to be too pleased. As a matter of fact, he'll be somewhat horsefaced to spend an afternoon and not catch anything.

Mr. Speaker, I first of all want to thank you for allowing me to enter into the debate of 206. I'm pleased to support this bill and hope it'll convince other members of this Assembly to do so as well. If passed, Bill 206 will give farmers the right to protect their fish stocks from predatory animals that overpopulate the ecosystem, devour fish stocks, and destroy the ecosystem by their presence.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to this bill from the perspective of Albertans who own and operate businesses that are dependent upon clean, natural, and balanced ecosystems. Bill 206 will allow government to keep Alberta's environment balanced, and it will be a positive for business owners, the government, and environmentalists alike. To work together like that, in parallel, is a new philosophy. However, it will work. This bill affects directly and indirectly Albertans and Alberta businesses that are heavily dependent on Alberta lakes and their environment. I can sympathize with those that it would affect: businesses in Alberta's environmental and recreational sectors that rely on several factors to succeed. Some of these factors they can't control. Rain or weather conditions are beyond their control and, for example, forest fires. But many of the factors which affect the profits of nature-based and recreational businesses can be controlled, and the activity and overpopulation of pests are two of these factors. This is especially true for those who own businesses that depend upon keeping fisheries and aquatic ecosystems in good condition. An infestation of pests damaging to the environment not only means less business but, more importantly, less Albertans to enjoy the great outdoors.

Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why anybody would want to not have a sustainable fish stock in Alberta. Cormorants are really not from northern Alberta, and if they were, then I would suspect that they would have many rats and large snakes to control them. So saying that, I would think that it would be our responsibility to replace such predators by controlling them and allowing people who have a direct investment to control them. We have to remember that a large infestation of pests like the cormorants is not at all natural, but their very occurrence is slowly becoming more and more serious and more troublesome for those who love the outdoors.

Mr. Speaker, government, business, environmentalists, and sportfishing enthusiasts have worked together on many occasions to ensure that the stress put on Alberta's fishery is manageable and is best for all parties involved. Like the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster put forward, it allows the minister to govern and to have tools available to him to engage in such activities. But when you have these pests interrupting the process in an unnatural fashion, like cormorants do, this causes a problem. Why spend time and money to restock and properly manage our fishery if cormorants are going to eat up all our fish? Our efforts would be to win, and it would be all in vain if we don't.

This is why this bill is necessary. As lakes in the province have been restocked over time, we've basically handed over a massive source of food to the predator. This leads to more predatory birds migrating here. These birds procreate and multiply at amazing rates. They attack our lakes and deplete our fish stocks, Mr. Speaker. It is therefore clear that Bill 206 is necessary to help our environment and help business related to the environment. This bill gives the Department of Sustainable Resource Development the power to identify the species of the pest, nongame birds, in accordance with the Wildlife Act, the Migratory Birds Convention Act, the Water Act, and the Fisheries Act.

The bill also gives Sustainable Resource Development the power to take steps to ensure the viability of fish stocks and their protection

from pests and to protect the biodiversity of Alberta's environment. Some of these steps include removal of beaver dams and issuing department orders. I want to make it clear, Mr. Speaker, that I support the fact that Bill 206 makes the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development the one person responsible for issuing the orders. This ensures that the department order that is delivered is not in haste and has gone through every possible channel.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, when the depredation order is delivered, the fish farmer can take steps within the confines of the order to rid himself of the pest problem. I'd like to take up this particular aspect of the bill. We don't need to run up the budget for Sustainable Resource Development by having officials running down cormorants and protecting fish stocks when farmers and local people know exactly how to get the job done and do so willingly.

Mr. Speaker, when farmers and individuals take charge, they know how to do things efficiently, because I'm a farmer and I know how to get the job done. Therefore, an Alberta farmer will rise to the occasion. We just need to give fish farmers the ability to take care of the problem, and I guarantee you that they'll be glad to do it.

4:00

In closing, I'd like to reiterate the support for this bill. Our businesses that depend upon a clean environment and sustainable wetlands would certainly be in favour of it. This especially applies to fish farmers. We've already heard the sponsor of the bill talk about his own experience: skies filled with birds, beaches filled with bird feces. At some point we have to say that enough is enough. Let the farmers take care of their problem. Bill 206 gives us the ability. I gladly support it and ask that other members of the Assembly do so as well. Thank you so very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in support of Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul has brought forth this bill to bring an issue to the attention of this Assembly that many people in Alberta and in particular his constituency have been dealing with for a long time. As many of my colleagues have already stated, the wild and stocked fish populations of Alberta are being severely threatened by a voracious predator. The cormorant is a large bird and not the cleanest bird to have as a neighbour.

Environmental conservationists in the Great Lakes region have been monitoring the effects of cormorant populations on the fish population for over 15 years. Their research has proven that cormorants hunt in large groups and prefer to catch fish more in shallow waters than offshore. I am hoping that by this statement, Mr. Speaker, I can help illustrate how Alberta, with our shallow lakes, is an ideal hunting ground or habitat for these birds, putting our fish population in jeopardy. The crested cormorant has become a hazard and a pest to the balance of our aquatic ecosystem.

We have been restocking our lakes for decades, which unfortunately has a spin-off effect of simply feeding these predatory pests. I know many of my colleagues have seen the effects that these birds have on a well-stocked lake or water body. They nest and hunt in large packs. In fact, environmental conservationists destroyed over 5,500 nests on one island alone in the Great Lakes region as these birds were destroying the fish population and vegetation around the island with their droppings and sheer numbers. Double-crested cormorants are a pest in Alberta because we have no natural predators for these birds, those being rats and large snakes, as has already been mentioned. Mr. Speaker, what we are dealing with is

a predator who has the ability and the free rein to multiply its population, and we keep providing it with the most opportune habitat by restocking its feed lakes.

Mr. Speaker, we have the ability as a province to act in our best interests and decide that the double-crested cormorant, because of its destructive feeding and nesting habits as well as its lack of natural predators, has proven that it is a pest in Alberta and a hazard to our natural aquatic ecosystem. Its population must be controlled. In conclusion, I will be supporting Bill 206 because I believe that it will give us the opportune legislation and the appropriate legislation to protect our ecosystem and control the damage it causes. I encourage all of my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to close debate, there being no other speakers offering themselves.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and conclude the second reading debate on Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002.

I would like to begin by thanking the members of the Assembly for their thoughtful comments regarding this proposed legislation. I would also like to say that this is a challenge for all Albertans and in fact all of North America. What happened is that we have seen some of the illustrations in the comments that were made by different individuals from throughout different parts of the province with their concerns, but also what happened is that we did get letters from different groups and different associations expressing their concerns, and maybe I'd like to address some of them.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd just like to talk about the bird society. Especially in my local area, when I talk about the bird society, what happens is that they want to protect the endangered species and the endangered birds, and the cormorants are really posing a problem in that direction. We all agree that Bill 206 is about protecting and enhancing Alberta's fish stocks and fishing industry. It has been commented by a member from across the way that this proposed legislation is just one piece in an overall puzzle of habitat and species management and not a comprehensive plan that takes into account all the pressures and needs faced by Alberta fisheries. I agree with this point. However, the members of this Assembly are familiar with the nature of the private member's bill, and we are aware that these bills cannot ask for resources. They are intended to address and raise awareness of problems and issues we face in our constituencies and not a cure-all for industry.

Mr. Speaker, before I close debate, I'd like to address some of the concerns that were raised during the course of debate. It was mentioned by a member that qualified biologists should be the ones who take the control orders under the proposed legislation. It is the minister who makes the call, but of course he would do it with the advice of many qualified biologists.

It was also mentioned that there is no requirement for record-keeping on the number of birds or eggs destroyed or the method of destruction. My experience with scientists has showed me that they love to keep records, and this is not going to be a problem.

The same member stated that private fish stocks, unlike wild stocks, should be dealt with by the agricultural legislation. Again, I wholeheartedly agree that it should be under the minister of agriculture when it comes to aquaculture.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to refer a little bit to a couple of comments that were made by the members on the other side. When we say that we must manage and that there must be a balance, I very much agree that there has to be a balance. This is not an exercise in

annihilation. This very much is an exercise in balance, and it will be done in that manner. I would also say, when we talk about the balance of the ecosystem, that we have already fooled with the balance of the ecosystem. As stated by some of the members, when we talk about the annihilation of the rats in Alberta, that has changed some of the balance there. We have allowed fishing. We have allowed fishing by commercial fishermen and by anglers. We have controlled that. We have there, as well, done some to change the balance of the ecosystem. There has been hunting and trapping of fur-bearing animals, and when I talk about the beavers, that has again changed some of the ecosystem. We are in a situation where we can isolate. The one bird that we're talking about today is the double-crested cormorant, that basically has no predators, and in order to maintain some balance, we need to have some monitored control.

Mr. Speaker, I call the question on the second reading of Bill 206. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a second time]

4:10

Bill 207

Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act

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

MR. HLADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move second reading of Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act.

Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do is start off by thanking my colleagues, because I think we have a very special mix of urban and rural in government caucus that allows us to truly appreciate many different issues. When something good happens for the cities, rural wins, and when something good happens for rural, cities win. We understand that connection inside our caucus, and it certainly makes a huge difference for us in making positive, good decisions for what's best for Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, many people have asked me: why Bill 207 from a Calgary MLA? It's really that with my background in the stock markets, as a financial adviser before, it was about understanding the fundamentals of the marketplace. That's really what we see and what this is truly all about. I saw the Canadian Wheat Board as possibly the most socialistic piece of legislation that sits in our federal government today. It is an unbelievable thing and has hurt our agricultural industry in an amazing way for the last 50-plus years. That's truly why I got involved with this as well as speaking with many of my colleagues from rural Alberta: to understand and see what this is all about. Even the Auditor General of Canada is not allowed to see the sales contracts in wanting to test and see if a monopoly system is better than an open market system. The Auditor General can get more information out of CSIS than it can get out of the Canadian Wheat Board. So it's really, really important to understand the goal of being in open competition to create a marketplace. This doesn't mean you have to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board, but what you need to do is create a marketplace where there is competition to see and allow us to move forward.

I think it's important to understand a little bit of the history of the Wheat Board. Post World War I, Mr. Speaker, it was formed the first time. It was disbanded in 1920, two years after World War I, because the government of the day could not justify such a monopoly in peacetime. Then the farmers established their own marketing organizations through wheat pools in each province, and farmers responded on their own to make things work. In 1935 the board was reintroduced, but it was still a voluntary marketing agency. In 1943

the board was granted the monopoly powers because of World War II. It's a little after World War II today, in 2002. Alberta at this time, in 1943, had 35 percent of the value-added agricultural economy created from wheat and barley. Today, over 50 years later, it's down to about 5 percent of the value-added agricultural commodity due to wheat and barley. All of that has moved from western Canada to eastern Canada. It was really an economic move that the Canadian Wheat Board created over an extended period of time.

I'd like to work on the current situation today as we have a designated area, and not all of Canada is part of that. Western Canada is. It includes Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and northeastern B.C. The producers are not allowed to make marketing decisions affecting their own product, and I think that's very hard for people to understand unless you work inside the agricultural community. Deliveries can only be made, when the Canadian Wheat Board calls for wheat, through delivery of contracts unless delivery is made to the off-board market as a feed wheat. In terms of exports, producers can buy wheat back from the Canadian Wheat Board. You've got to buy your own grain back from the Wheat Board. You can't even make a decision on what you want. I don't understand that. It's just unbelievable in a Canadian marketplace.

Bill 207 would certainly allow for and accomplish some direct marketing, Mr. Speaker, and that's really what it's all about. For domestic consumption sales, farmers are forced today to let a third party make the decision on what grades to market, to whom to market, when to market, and what price to market. The farmer is then provided with a net price realized on the sales over the year for a particular grade of grain. With marketing and administration costs as well as operating costs deducted from the gross sales value, thus the farmer loses control of what can be sold, when it can be sold, and the price at which it can be sold. Unbelievable.

DR. TAYLOR: It is unbelievable.

MR. HLADY: It really is.

Now, Mr. Speaker, one of the positives, actually, of having the Canadian Wheat Board has been the shift away from products controlled by the Canadian Wheat Board, so that might be the one positive that we've seen in the whole marketplace. We've seen many other specialized products come up because of the fact that the Canadian Wheat Board is today controlling the grains that they do in the way that they do. Just to read, some of the other ones that we're seeing people come up with that have grown in quite impressive ways are things such as canola; we're seeing a good increase in mixed grains; dry peas; mustard; sunflowers; lentils. So the one minor positive, I guess I could say, of having control by the Wheat Board is that it has allowed for diversification. But the success is obviously not in the monopolistic areas, which are the areas that are controlled by the Canadian Wheat Board, being the different wheats and barleys.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario has the Ontario wheat board, which is separate from the Canadian Wheat Board and has allowed some interesting things to develop over time. That has allowed the farmers there a little bit of flexibility. It's not the ideal situation. Historically, I've introduced in the past an Alberta wheat and barley board which would have been very similar to that. It did not receive support at that time; hence the move toward this 10-year test market plan for which, I feel very comfortable, there is a lot of support here in the House.

We've seen some very interesting things with the Ontario wheat board. Let's see. In '96 and '97 the report found that the grand total of marketing costs in Ontario ranged from \$17.40 to \$31.30. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, the costs through the Canadian Wheat

Board were \$56.89. That's anywhere from two to three times the costs of the Ontario wheat board, which has a lot smaller market to work with, so the economies of scale don't even make sense.

It should be noted that part of this significantly lower marketing cost structure of Ontario compared to the Canadian Wheat Board is due to Ontario's location and size of crop relative to demand in eastern Canada. But the size of the total growth: as an example, western Canada produces 95 percent of Canada's wheat. That is only about 31 percent of the flour milling capacity today, Mr. Speaker. Eastern Canada does the vast majority of the value-added part of the wheat processing.

I think that understanding also some of the things that happen in the world today is very important. Right now Canada's share of the world flour production has decreased by 9 percent, Mr. Speaker, over the last 10 years. At the same time, our neighbours to the south, the U.S., their milled wheat has increased by approximately 30 percent. So there's been the demand, and it's a North American demand, but Canada is not meeting the world's demand. It's all coming through the United States. The Canadian Wheat Board is not helping us to achieve that kind of access to the markets in the world, which is one of the major reasons that the Canadian Wheat Board is supposedly in place to do. The United States processes more than twice as much malt barley as Canada, yet they only have about half the barley production relative to Canada. It makes no sense again. We are shipping it through the Canadian Wheat Board rather than creating the value-added.

Mr. Speaker, I know that there was a major malt barley plant just formed in Montana, just south of the Alberta border. I believe there was an investment of around \$67 million U.S. Now, that could very easily have been built up here, but there was no current situation that would allow us a chance to have that value-added market move here with the current structure today.

Mr. Speaker, there have been some interesting changes relatively recently in Australia as well. Australia went through a barley board experience very recently, getting rid of the monopoly powers. Systematically we've been blocked by the Canadian Wheat Board, but in Australia, interestingly enough and with a Labour government yet, the Labour government has allowed the states to make their own decisions. Constitutionally our provinces have power over agricultural things inside the provinces. This is not being allowed because of the structure of the Canadian Wheat Board. The Australians have this thing called the National Competition Council, which allowed the Australians to go through this process and allowed the individual states to create individual marketing. It's great to see.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, I know that there are many other speakers that would like to talk to this. The main point I'd like to make is that this does not get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. This allows us to create competition. The Canadian Wheat Board has had a 50-year head start. They should have had enough time to be competitive. I would also like to say that there was a wonderful news release by the Western Barley Growers that said that they believe that this will allow Alberta farmers to fully take advantage of the Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and participate in this discussion. I have had a look at Bill 207 and have given it some thought, and I will be taking it out to

various people I know in the agricultural community. It raises a lot of huge issues, actually, for Alberta wheat and barley growers and, indeed, for all Canadians because of the size and the importance of the Canadian Wheat Board nationally and internationally as a massive grade grain trader.

I appreciated the introductory comments from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I listened with some care to a number of the things he raised. For the moment I'm keeping an open mind on this particular bill. We'll see how the debate goes and where it heads and what issues come to the surface and what various stakeholders say.

I know that the intent of the bill is to create an open and competitive market and through the forces of the market bring down costs of production, to bring creative dynamics into the economics of wheat and barley production and trade and processing and consumption, but I am concerned that what sounds good in theory may not work out very well in practice.

One of the issues that farmers in Canada struggle with – and I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View is well aware of this, as are many of the members of the Assembly – is their ability to have an honest and free and open market internationally when virtually every other competing country in the world has all kinds of mechanisms to subsidize their production or to otherwise protect their producers.

I am conscious, for example, that enormous amounts of corn are being trucked into southern Alberta, staggering amounts, thousands and thousands of tonnes a month, to feed the feed stocks that go through Feedlot Alley. What are they called now? They're not feedlots. They're confined feeding operations, something like that. In any case, enormous amounts of corn are being brought up by truck from the United States. If you dig a little bit into the economics of that corn, there's some really alarming information that comes to the surface. In fact, the corn is being sold at less than the cost of production, and that's made possible because of staggeringly large subsidies to American corn growers. Those subsidies are so vast that even after the loss on the exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and the Canadian dollar and the cost of trucking these thousands of tonnes of corn, these grain imports are able to beat out locally grown Alberta barley. That's a very serious concern, especially as we get more and more into feedlot operations in this province. It's no fault of the Alberta farmer or the Canadian farmer, who, if there were genuinely a free market, would well be able to stand his or her ground against any competition. So while I laud the notion of a free market in grains, I am concerned that it may not play out.

I go back to introductory economics in university. In fact, one of the classic case studies presented and taught to students of an ideal free market was actually the market for grain. If you have a perfect situation in grain – and you come pretty close to it there – theoretically you can have a genuine free market. You have a large, large number of producers. You have a commodity that's very consistent, so it's easy to substitute barley or wheat from farmer A with that from farmer B or farmer C. So it's easy for consumers to shop around and substitute one farmer's product for another's. In theory – and I stress here “in theory” – you have a huge number of consumers. After all, we all eat grain. We all eat wheat; we all eat barley or drink it or whatever. It's literally a textbook example of a free market. Again I raise a concern that what works in the textbook and on paper doesn't necessarily translate into practice.

In reality, we do have thousands and thousands of farmers producing wheat and grain in Alberta, and we do have a commodity that's easily traded, but the fact is that there are only a small, small number of major buyers of that product. There are I think only about four corporations that trade in any substantial volume at all in

wheat and barley, and I am concerned that as a result of that, we lose the possibility of a free market. I stand to be corrected on that, but I don't believe so. That's not just a factor of there being a Wheat Board in Canada, because a similar sort of situation exists in the U.S., where the grain trading is completely dominated by a tiny, tiny number of massive grain-trading corporations.

So the idea of this bill to create a free market in grains is great. I actually think that free markets, when they are genuinely free, are commendable. My concern is that in this case we won't see a free market. We can actually see this same sort of thing in practice in health care or in electricity deregulation, where attempts at creating free markets simply don't work. What happens? Prices go up, and there are all kinds of problems with accessibility. So I'm concerned that we risk undermining one of the last pillars of the family farm through this bill.

I do appreciate, however, the fact that in this bill, as the sponsoring member has made quite clear, we're not replacing the Canadian Wheat Board. We are setting up a parallel market or a parallel system to the Canadian Wheat Board. That's an interesting twist. We have to think through that and speak to some people about whether that will actually work or not or whether at some point that might simply undermine the strength of the Wheat Board.

I have quite a number of farmers in my extended family, and we have had some discussions about the role of the Wheat Board. I know, as I'm sure the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and many other members know, that the farm community is divided on this issue. Some of them think that the Wheat Board for all its problems is better than no Wheat Board. Others would rather just get rid of the whole thing and see how they can manage on an open market, going toe-to-toe with the grain traders or with whatever the market generates.

I am concerned that one of the effects of this bill is to create yet another source of instability for the family farm in Alberta. I think that this kind of legislation is more likely in the long run to support corporate farming and corporate grain traders and squeeze the family farm harder and harder. [interjections] I appreciate some of the supportive comments from my colleagues.

But there is a real concern that the family farm in the long run may be threatened, may be further undermined by that, and ironically we may end up in a situation in the future where we as a Legislature will be debating farm subsidies that will be required as a result of this bill.

So with those comments, I will take my seat. Thank you.

4:30

MR. McFARLAND: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased today to join in the debate on Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act, sponsored by my colleague from Calgary-Mountain View. I do want to congratulate him as an urban cousin for bringing this bill forward, because it truly does demonstrate that there is a lot of understanding as this industry has grown. I believe that this bill is very important and that it addresses a very important issue that this Assembly is now going to debate. Once again, I'm pleased that Calgary-Mountain View has brought this to the forefront.

[Mr. Klapstein in the chair]

For a long, long time wheat and barley farmers around Alberta have waited to see changes made in how their products are marketed. I believe that this act would in effect bring the efforts of farmers and government together to address a 70-year-old problem. Bill 207 brings the wheat and barley producers in this province the opportunity to have personal choice. It's my belief that farmers

should have that right to choose what they can bring to the market and to choose how they can have an opportunity to set a different price for a commodity that they and they alone are solely responsible for growing. Currently, these choices aren't available under this system, Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board system, where options are rather limited and I believe restrictive.

As the Member for Calgary-Mountain View indicated, the Canadian Wheat Board was established almost 70 years ago. At the time, long before probably all of us were even alive – well, most of us anyway, Mr. Speaker – it was designed to ensure and monitor a supply of wheat and barley throughout Canada for foodstuffs. But today, Mr. Speaker, especially in Alberta, food shortages and tough times basically are no longer a reality.

What is a reality is that farmers are, as the Member for Edmonton-Riverview indicated, facing hard choices. But contrary to what the member might have spoken about in terms of stability on a farm, I believe that the majority of the constituents that I represent and in fact the majority of Alberta wheat and barley producers do support some change in order that they may become viable and may remain stable in today's economy.

If this bill were passed, obviously the results of this would be closely monitored and certain stipulations maintained for a period of 10 years. I believe that's one of the good attributes of this bill, as it allows a pilot of sorts to see if in fact this can work hand in hand with the Wheat Board, where you'd have the option of producers choosing to market and take some responsibility and marketing decisions on their own, and those who would rather maintain the status quo could stay under the guise of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board has accomplished a good deal for farmers. Bill 207 does not remove the Wheat Board, and I don't believe that's the intent. But many farmers in the past decade that I'm aware of have again argued and put forward that they do need the opportunity to have a dual choice or a marketing choice, and I believe that this bill would provide that. This bill allows the farmers the choice to compete in a free market, to sell their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board if they so choose, or to take that responsibility in finding markets of their own either internally or within the western Canadian growing provinces.

I think that many of our growers feel powerless and frustrated when they deal with the Canadian Wheat Board and the quota system, and I have to remind those who aren't acutely familiar with the farming situation that not all grains are under the Canadian Wheat Board. In fact, Edmonton-Riverview mentioned the Feedlot Alley, which happens to be in the heart of our constituency. For clarification to that member and those of you who may not be aware, the malt barley – unless it is of such a poor quality that you put it in the ground and never are guaranteed the opportunity or the assurance that it would make a malt grade – is fed to the cows in Feedlot Alley. These are feed barleys, and those feed barleys are not under the control of the Canadian Wheat Board. They used to be, but thank goodness for some of us, some of the grains that had been under the Wheat Board before are no longer under the Wheat Board. So I do think, Edmonton-Riverview, just for clarification, please bear in mind that the malt barley that you're drinking in the form of beer is a different type of barley that's produced here in Alberta. Most producers of malt barley will go after that market as opposed to one that goes into a cow's stomach in Feedlot Alley to produce some of Alberta's best beef.

The other comment I would like to make in terms of progress that the Wheat Board has made, Mr. Speaker, is one of pricing. Now, I've been a critic of the Canadian Wheat Board ever since I started farming some 30 years ago. One of the reasons was that the Canadian Wheat Board made payments at various times throughout

the year or at the end of a crop year, usually some 18 months after the beginning of a current crop year at the beginning of my farming career. As a beginning farmer, many of whom may be here today, probably could recollect, it was very frustrating to know that your own money was being held up by the Canadian Wheat Board to wait for an accounting practice that pooled all the various grades and then finally disbursed your own money back some 18 months after the fact without any benefit in terms of interest. In the meantime, you probably swallowed quite a few of the costs of demurrage. Sadly enough, when these payments were made, the headlines would read, "Record Payment to Alberta Farmers," and everyone thought: aha; the Canadian Wheat Board or the federal government or somebody magically came up with some new money for the whiny farmer. Well, in fact, I would like all the listeners and the readers of *Hansard* to remember that this was the producers' own money that had been banked in the pooling accounts of the Canadian Wheat Board for up to and including 18 months.

Now, the point I'm trying to drive home here is that the Wheat Board has made some pretty good changes in the last couple of years, Mr. Speaker. One is being more in tune with the current market conditions. They are putting out interim adjustments on a more frequent basis. That's a positive, but again that's the farmer's own money for the product that they are selling internationally on behalf of western Canadian farmers. The other thing that they have done and I have to give them credit for is going to electronic deposits and assisting farmers in that regard. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the Wheat Board has been quite reluctant to open up its arms to allow farmers to contract with flour mills, to contract with other value-added producers within the province, which in turn would encourage more value-added production here in Alberta.

So if there's a bottom line to this whole conversation from my point of view, Mr. Speaker, it's approval of this bill, setting up an opportunity for farmers dealing with the hard spring wheats, the durums, and the malt barleys to make a choice whether they want to market their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board internationally or to deal with a company who wants to add value to that product and produce flour, produce pastas, produce maybe locally manufactured beer. It could be done on a contract basis and would eliminate probably the sorest point to a good many farmers, and that's the one of the costs of freight, handling, elevation, storage, and so on.

4:40

As an example, Mr. Speaker, I will quote my own durum production, which represents a lot of similar farms in southern Alberta. Last year when No. 1 durum was taken from the combine and hauled to an elevator, 29.4 percent of the gross value of that product was automatically eliminated at the top of the cheque for freight to Vancouver, for handling, for elevation. The sad part was that in the case of durum some of it was put on a truck and simply sent down to Ellison mills, for instance, in Lethbridge.

Mr. Speaker, I know that many of us can go on, especially those of us on the farm, but I would encourage everyone to support this worthy bill.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Highwood.

MR. TANNAS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act, sponsored by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I want to congratulate him on his bill, and I have received many letters of support for him.

Mr. Speaker, during my tenure as MLA I've received a number of

letters and telephone calls on the issues from farmers in the constituency of Highwood. The letters and calls from farmers follow a similar theme, and that is that many farmers are not happy with the Canadian Wheat Board as a single-desk seller. These constituents have asked me as their representative to lobby the government to find some solution to the problems and constraints posed by the Canadian Wheat Board. I believe that Bill 207 is a potential solution to the problems that farmers face with the Canadian Wheat Board.

The problem with the Canadian Wheat Board is not a single one; there are many of them. The main problem, as I understand it, is that the Alberta farmers make decisions on everything: what barley and wheat varieties, what other grains, oilseeds, what they want to plant, the types and rates of fertilizer applications, when to plant, when and how to harvest a producing crop. Our farmers make all of these decisions, yet when it comes time to make the most important decision of all, marketing their wheat or barley, they are in effect told that they're not qualified to do so, and they're forced by the dominion government to let a third party sell their wheat for them. This third party is, as we know, the Canadian Wheat Board.

Now, the board has long outgrown its usefulness in western Canada and in Alberta in particular. This is not a matter of getting rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. It is a matter of allowing a choice for our farmers to sell their product to the Canadian Wheat Board or a private dealer or a private and direct sale. The Canadian Wheat Board has grown into a very large and lethargic bureaucratic nightmare. Farmers are having problems justifying to themselves why they must continue to use the single-desk selling entity. Farmers are concerned because over the last 25 years they have made sacrifices to improve the efficiency of their farms in order to continue farming. At the same time, they've seen the Canadian Wheat Board grow ever larger and make the same mistakes over and over again at the cost of the farmers, without the farmers' say.

Farmers are fed up with the hoops they have to jump through to sell their wheat and barley in a monopoly situation which is forced on all prairie farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and in northeastern B.C. They ask: why are the farmers in Ontario not forced to sell their wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board? Why are the farmers in Quebec not forced to sell their wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board? Why are the farmers in New Brunswick not forced to sell their wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board? Why are the farmers in Nova Scotia not forced to sell their wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board? And why are the farmers of Prince Edward Island not forced? Well, as our hon. Member for Little Bow and the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View have explained, it's because they are forced by an outdated law that arose out of the Second World War to deal with the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that farmers are intelligent and experienced businesspeople. They know what it takes to keep their farm, which is their business, afloat. They just want the freedom to be able to choose to whom they can sell their wheat or barley. They want to be able to run their own business without the interference from hindrances of the Canadian Wheat Board. I believe that the Canadian Wheat Board does not always help the agricultural industry. In fact, many people believe that it's hurting the industry and costing farmers a whole lot of money. The Canadian Wheat Board doesn't seem to be able to deal with small market opportunities and in fact stands in the way of farmers seeking niche markets for their wheat or their barley. Bill 207 is exactly what farmers need. Bill 207 hears the concerns of farmers, takes them to heart, and offers them as a solution to the monopoly that is the Canadian Wheat Board. It offers an alternative to the Wheat Board, something that is desperately needed.

Bill 207 sets up a 10-year test market to allow farmers to sell their grain and barley to whomever they choose. It gives farmers the choice to sell their grain to either a private processor, the Canadian Wheat Board, or both. The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has cited a number of lost value-added opportunities that are caused by the restrictions of the Canadian Wheat Board. Mr. Speaker, I too feel that the Canadian Wheat Board is a serious hindrance to our value-added industry. Let me give you an example. Let us imagine that a pasta company comes to a farmer here in Alberta and says: okay; we see that your soil and the rainfall and the hours of sunshine and the temperatures here are perfect for the wheat that we want to make our pasta from; I want to buy your wheat so I can make pasta. The farmer given this opportunity would have to refuse it, because of course they live in the western part of Canada and the Wheat Board says: no, you can't do that. So the pasta people go to the Wheat Board and ask for that particular farmer's wheat. Again, because all of the wheat is pooled, they can't avail themselves of that opportunity. So the pasta company then withdraws the offer and locates elsewhere. They can find a farmer in Nova Scotia or some of the other provinces I just listed and establish their business there.

This type of scenario can and does happen. The policy of the Wheat Board is in my view a very discriminatory policy to farmers in the west and not to central Canada and eastern Canada. It's the western farmers whose freedoms are trampled, and they're not allowed to do what's best for their business. The value-added industry has a lot of potential for Alberta farmers. I believe that the scenario that I portrayed could be avoided if Bill 207 were passed.

Mr. Speaker, a few months ago I received a letter from a constituent, a farmer who felt that she needed to express what was wrong with the Canadian Wheat Board. A fault that she sees is that the board is not accountable. They do not conduct their operations in a businesslike nor a professional way nor in a way that is in the best interests of Alberta's farmers because they get paid any way that they do business. Farmers no longer want to deal with the problems that are associated with the Canadian Wheat Board. As my constituent stated in her letter: farmers are as mad as H, and they're not going to take this kind of treatment anymore. They are looking for solutions so they can advance to greater heights in the agricultural industry. If the farmers of Nova Scotia have an option, why can't the farmers of Alberta?

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I urge all MLAs to vote in favour of Bill 207. It's in the best interest of farmers throughout Alberta and the west. Give them a fair option. Thank you.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 207, Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act, which seems to be a simplified version of a bill that was debated in this House in '99. It was at that time numbered Bill 209, and it was defeated after a very interesting debate in this House. With due respect to the chair, the chair in fact as a Member for Leduc spoke rather passionately and clearly against Bill 209, which was called the Alberta Wheat and Barley Board Act at the time.

What's different in Bill 207 now from Bill 209 that was defeated by this House just a few years ago? That's the question that I'm asking. I think what I find here is that there is some detail in Bill 207 which at that time worried the speaker; that's the hon. Member for Leduc. At the time it had to do with the powers of the board, the bureaucracy that will have to be set up to have an alternative marketing agency Alberta style. You spoke very strongly at the time

against that bill. You drew attention to the fact that it will not only increase costs by duplication of the bureaucracy, but it will also restrict the choices and will contravene two federal acts, the Wheat Board Act and the Canada Grains Act, Mr. Speaker. Those two acts, I would like to suggest, still remain in place, and federal acts have paramountcy over provincial acts.

4:50

To quote you, if I may, from '99, Mr. Speaker, you said that this act "creates another agency with exclusive rights to the buying and selling of wheat and barley." Of course, the issue of exclusiveness is now sort of buried under the notion of test market in this act. You go on to say, then, that it will

require Alberta farmers to register to produce as well as to market their wheat and barley. It could determine the price to be paid to producers and require the price payable to be paid to or through the board. It duplicates the Canadian Wheat Board on a provincial basis. It could restrict marketing within the province. It could significantly reduce freedom of choice in marketing and enhance the single-desk marketing of wheat and barley.

Alberta farmers and industry would still be held accountable under the Canadian Wheat Board Act and the Canada Grains Act. Apparently, under constitutional law any provincial laws which are operationally inconsistent with federal laws are inoperative to the extent of the inconsistency.

You argued then, Mr. Speaker:

Therefore, any provision in the bill which required a producer or any other person to do something which was contrary to the Canadian Wheat Board Act or the Canada Grains Act would be inoperative to the extent that it created the inconsistency.

So, Mr. Speaker, you in a very clear way raised some of the objections that I think apply to this bill. What this bill doesn't do is that it doesn't provide us any information about a board or an agency or an organizational mechanism that will have to be set up in order to create the so-called test market and the provisions for it. So something that was rather explicitly mentioned in Bill 209 is pushed under the table if not underground in this act. If this act does pass, regulations will have to be set up. Arrangements will have to be spelled out through regulations as to the bureaucratic machinery that'll be needed in order to implement this act. I think members of this House and certainly this member will not be able to support this act unless I know what were the costs of it, what is the bureaucratic structure that will have to be set up to implement this act. So the questions that you raised and raised very well three years ago remain questions pertinent to the debate today.

There was something said by the hon. Member for Highwood with respect to how western Canadians feel discriminated against and are not allowed to do what Ontario farmers and Quebec farmers have been able to do. I've heard in this Assembly lots of arguments about the uniqueness of Alberta, about the uniqueness of the prairie region and how those unique elements and features of Alberta and of the prairie region require unique actions. I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that the Canadian Wheat Board was one such unique response to the unique production and marketing conditions in the experience of family farmers in this region of the country. The one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work, and that's why the Canadian Wheat Board has stood the test of time. It continued to enjoy majority support in the referendum that was done just a few years ago, and you mentioned that, I think, in your speech three years ago, Mr. Speaker.

I ask what has changed between '99 and now. The only thing that seems to have changed is that Bill 209 has been stripped to bare bones and the board has been eliminated in terms of any reference to it in this and has been replaced by this notion of a test market. Nothing else has changed, and no argument has been made that things have changed. It's just that this act, if passed by this House,

will allow this government of Alberta to enter into some sort of negotiations with the federal government. For the federal government to engage in negotiations on a bill that will in fact contravene existing federal legislation will mean that the federal government will be violating its own act. So I can't see how the passage of this bill in this Legislature will encourage the federal government to sit down around the table and say: yeah, we are willing to deal with you and not make any changes in the existing federal legislation first.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

If the intention is to engage the government in sort of a discussion so that necessary changes can be made in the Canadian Wheat Board Act and the Canada Grains Act, then I think those negotiations should precede voting on this bill, not follow it. I just want to remind members, Mr. Speaker, that this bill, if passed, will certainly lead to undermining and weakening the Canadian Wheat Board, and the Canadian Wheat Board is seen by family farmers – not corporate farming, but certainly by family farmers – as a very important institution that has proved its utility to them. They've been able to rely on it, they've been able to defend themselves against private, corporate, predatory multinationals around.

DR. TAYLOR: Why don't you talk to the farmers about it?

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Hon. minister, if you wish to be on the list, we'd be happy to put you on the list, but right now it is Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the minister for co-operating on this matter.

So, Mr. Speaker, this bill by weakening . . .

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Sorry, hon. member; your time has now passed. Even the interruption does not take away from your time. The clock stops when there's either a point of order or the Speaker has an intervention, so you didn't lose any time.

The hon. Member for Airdrie-Rocky View.

MS HALEY: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased today to be able to have the opportunity to rise and speak on Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act. I would like to begin this afternoon by thanking the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for bringing forward this bill and for his continued efforts to see change brought to the Alberta wheat and barley industry. Well done.

The Canadian Wheat Board, Mr. Speaker, has been a topic of heated debate for western Canadian wheat and barley producers for many decades now. It is an issue that I have had some personal experience dealing with, along with many other members of this Assembly. It is a topic that we should all be concerned with, and I'm very happy to add my thoughts to this debate.

5:00

I see Bill 207's intent as a fundamental right of every wheat and barley producer in this province, the right to determine the future course of their product. It is a right that underpins our most basic understanding of capitalism and commerce, and it is time for it to be given back to some of the most capitalistic as opposed to socialistic free enterprise people that I know, and that is the farmers of this province. In this case it is a right that involves allowing farmers the ability and the opportunity to sell their wheat and barley not only – not only – to the Canadian Wheat Board but to whatever marketing

agent they choose, as opposed to the comments made by the leader of the third party indicating that somehow it would be a single-desk Alberta market. That is not the goal. This is about dual marketing, the ability to have a choice. If you want to deal with the Wheat Board, good for you. If you don't, then you should have a choice.

Today farmers do not have that choice, and if they wish to grow wheat or barley for human consumption, they must sell it to the Wheat Board. No questions asked. Even if they want to process the grain themselves, they are legally obligated to first sell the product to the Wheat Board and buy it back. Talk about efficiency. If farmers try to sell their product to any other destination than the board, they face serious and damaging consequences. All hon. members here today probably recall the story of Andy McMechan, who was one of several farmers who attempted to sell their grain in the border states of the United States in 1998. He spent 155 days in jail after refusing to pay the fine because he tried to sell his own grain.

The insistence by some to prevent choice for wheat and barley farmers is bizarre. There's no other private industry in Canada that matches their level of regulation and control, but there are other important reasons we should change the Wheat Board besides the principle demanded for choice. Let us for example look at the current changes that are occurring within the grain marketing industry. One of the most interesting trends in agriculture over the past decade has been the growth in the production and sale of specialty crops, and my hon. colleague alluded to it earlier. The Wheat Board has refused to address the underlying concerns of producers on wheat and barley, and in the same manner that capitalism responds to inefficiency so, too, have farmers moved away from an ineffectual and an overregulating board.

Over the past decade permit holders of the board have steadily declined. Growth in board wheats and barley has been stagnant, where speciality crops such as potatoes, peas, oats, and canola have undergone dynamic growth. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Alberta Agriculture predicts farm gate sales for such diversified crops to reach over \$670 million . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MS HALEY: Over \$674 million by 2004. It's an incredible achievement and one that we should all be very proud of, but the growth need not be limited to nonboard crops alone. Producers need to be able to seize technological innovation and lucrative and fast-moving opportunities that exist for organic grains and specialty wheats. More than ever, direct dealing is necessitated between the grower and the end user. The Canadian Wheat Board simply does not facilitate this growing demand for specialization.

The Alberta producer is not afraid of challenge or risk and, in the words of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, "Give us the tools, and we will finish the job." That attitude, Mr. Speaker, will allow this province to capture the enormous impact that grain selling and purchasing can have on the growth of the value-added processing industry. Quite simply, investors are reluctant to put money into processing knowing that they cannot enter into normal business relations with local farmers.

One has to wonder, Mr. Speaker, why it is that western Canada produces 95 percent of Canada's wheat but has only 31 percent of the flour-milling capacity. You have to wonder why it is that in terms of manufacturing value added in the bread and other bakery products industry, Canada has experienced an increase of only 3 percent between 1990 and 1998, whereas the United States experienced a growth rate of 6.7 percent annually. You have to wonder why the U.S. processed more than twice as much malt barley as

Canada, yet they have only about half the barley production relative to Canada. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that domestic processing of oats has increased twelvefold since it was removed from the Canadian Wheat Board in 1989, and during this same period domestic crush of canola has increased 125 percent.

Mr. Speaker, I want to add just an anecdotal story on oats. I was involved in a grain company that started in Alberta somewhere back in the early '80s, you know. We went out and we found all the right-wing, free enterprise, willing to take a risk farmers in this province – and the minister was one of them – and we proceeded to sell their wheat and barley. Well, we wanted to sell oats, and you couldn't sell oats. The Wheat Board wouldn't allow you to do that because it was under their control. The reason they gave for this was – they had not gone out and developed a market, and oats had become just a problem for them. It just wasn't something they were prepared to deal with. We had a market in Venezuela. They weren't mechanized in Venezuela, and they needed our oats for their horses. Our oats are recognized around the world as being some of the highest quality oats anywhere in the world. We needed to be able to sell it in 50-pound bags, and the Canadian Wheat Board would not allow us to tap into that market and sell Alberta oats over there, because there was no flexibility and no desire to deal with a small, innovative company such as Palliser Grain. If it wasn't from the Alberta Wheat Pool or UGG, it wasn't going to happen in this province when it came to dealing with the Wheat Board. You know, it's funny how in a capitalist free market system it can produce results.

Mr. Speaker, some farmers will continue to use the Wheat Board as a low-risk alternative for some of their production, but we must work towards allowing alternative marketers. The Canadian Wheat Board should relinquish its singular grip over the wheat and barley trade. If it actually applied the same principles to Ontario and Quebec and the rest of eastern Canada, it would have been gone 30 or 40 years ago, but because it's just western Canada and we're just sort of the hind end of the cow, it doesn't matter out here. What we want simply doesn't count. You ask for a dual marketing system and the answer is going to be no forever. You've got to take a dramatic stand. I think it would be fascinating for this Assembly to know how much it really cost us over the years on all of the wheat and barley sales that the Canadian Wheat Board made and never had to report openly and honestly to any government anywhere in this country.

On QR77 one day Peter Warren was on talking about his information showing that Russia, from years gone by, owed us over \$6.5 billion that has never been paid for wheat that had been sent to them. Now, I don't have the stats on that – somebody faxed him a copy of it – but it's fascinating. I believe that that was probably almost an annual event, because they never had to open their books, they never had to be accountable to anybody out here, and they got to set the prices and decide when anything was going and which direction it was going. It blows my mind. Even with the elections that they've got in place now, Mr. Speaker, I still don't think it's worthy. I don't think it should be the only alternative that Alberta farmers have.

I want to thank you very much for the time that you've given me, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to join in the debate this afternoon on Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act. I have listened with a great deal of interest to the debate so far, and it certainly is a contentious issue.

Now, we had a bit of a history lesson earlier this afternoon from the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Before we set up this

concept of dual marketing or allowing more choice – and certainly on a lot of issues in this Assembly we hear the argument of: what is the matter with choice? – one has to wonder exactly what is wrong with choice. If you look at the past, Mr. Speaker – and we sort of had a walk down memory lane earlier – one has to look at perhaps, before we talk about eroding the powers of the Wheat Board, some of the successes that have come as a result of what the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona would refer to as collective action.

Going back, one has to recognize the importance in the prairie provinces, not only in Alberta but Manitoba and Saskatchewan, of production of all grains and certainly here in this province the production of grains and how it affects the production of cattle. We certainly have a very, very large value-added industry in this province with cattle production. In fact, in the year 2000 the production of cattle and meat products was in excess of \$3 billion. We were second to the province of Saskatchewan in the production of wheat, at over \$700 million, and you can go on, regardless of whether it's barley, canola, as was mentioned, soybeans, or even sugar beets.

5:10

When you look at how these farm products are marketed, we have to look at some of the successes that have occurred in the past. It was a Prime Minister of Canada who was from Calgary – he certainly sat in the House of Commons as a member from Calgary – R.B. Bennett, who organized and encouraged the responsibility of the orderly sale of wheat to one John McFarland. Now, this decision was of course compelled by the economic events in the fall of 1929. In August of 1929, Mr. Speaker, the Winnipeg price for top-grade wheat was still averaging \$1.73 a bushel. In the fall of course we saw the collapse of the New York stock markets and price declines, massive enough to spread shock waves throughout every market in the world, including those of grain.

In February of 1930 the Winnipeg price for wheat had fallen to \$1.15 a bushel. Six months before, 48 million bushels were pledged to banks at a value of approximately \$1.70 per bushel, and each bushel was now worth 60 cents less on the market. The banks began to worry about their loans and so did the prairie provincial governments under their guarantees. As the year advanced and the gloom deepened and the nervousness of the bankers and the provincial governments increased, Mr. Bennett came up with a solution, and that solution was summed up in the name John McFarland.

Now, I have no idea if this gentleman is a long-distant relative of the hon. Member for Little Bow, but it remains to be seen that this Mr. McFarland was an astute trader of grain. Within the limits of his powers Mr. McFarland became a very successful manager of Canadian wheat sales, and Mr. McFarland's decision on when to sell and when to withhold supplies from the market helped to raise the price of wheat to 83 cents a bushel by the summer of 1933. Now, again it fell to 60 cents a bushel by the end of the year, but the following two years the price was relatively stable at 80 cents to 85 cents a bushel.

At one time Mr. McFarland held 213 million bushels in storage and was in debt to the banks for over \$90 million, but by the end of 1935 the situation was easing and McFarland was finally able to dispose of the whole Canadian surplus, repay the banks all principal and interest, and hold \$9 million in cash, to his credit. As he himself said, Mr. Speaker: the final success was more the result of crop failures than of general world economic recovery. There were of course three bad years of drought in North America, two in Australia, and, finally, one in Argentina in 1935.

However, people worked together and they pooled their resources and as a result managed their way out of a very difficult time. That

is a lesson, Mr. Speaker, that I think is worth while noting for all hon. members of this Assembly, because there certainly is a place for organizations such as the Wheat Board.

Now, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview spoke earlier about who exactly would benefit from this Bill 207, and we have to ask ourselves the question: will rural Alberta be better off? I guess it depends on who you would speak to. But as this debate continues on Bill 207, again the word "choice" slips into the debate. It's supposedly an ideal compromise, Mr. Speaker, but I doubt that this bill would make a good law. Now, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe this idea of choice is going to be better for family farms in Alberta.

We can continue in this province to increase subsidies to the province's biggest corporate farms – and I'm sad to say that this seems to be the consensus of this Assembly – or we can make a significant investment in creating real opportunity in rural Alberta. I don't think we can do both. At some time we have to have the debate in this Assembly – and perhaps this is the opportunity, with Bill 207 – as to precisely what sort of guarantees we're going to have for the family farm. Are we just going to allow the concentration of food production in the hands of a few, or in the strategic interests of all Albertans and all Canadians are we going to have the production of food in the hands of many?

Now, one only has to drive in certain areas of rural Alberta to have a look at opportunity. Opportunity is in short supply, in my view, in some areas of rural Alberta. There are stretches of rural Alberta that are in significant decline. At this time, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to get into the description of this government's policies on rural Alberta, the highway 2 mentality, where if it's 50 kilometres east or west of the highway, then we're going to have development and we're going to have services and to heck with the rest. I'm not going to get into that because I only have a few minutes left. But across a wide swath of rural Alberta, communities are shrinking and dying, churches and schools are closing, and businesses are leaving town and going to the next largest market town and setting up shop there and trying to make a living. It is my view that community decline is driven by agricultural decline.

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the distinct pleasure to join my colleagues and rise to speak to the spirit and intent of Bill 207, the Alberta wheat and barley direct marketing act. Our province along with Saskatchewan and Manitoba produces the bulk of the annual Canadian wheat and barley harvest. Ranking second behind Saskatchewan in 2000, Alberta produced over a quarter of the total wheat crop, at an estimated value of \$912.4 million. That figure is approximately 30 percent of the value of the sum total of the Canadian wheat crop. For barley during the same period our province's yield was 44 percent of the national, and cash receipts exceeded over \$200 million, representing 35.6 percent of the national production. In other words, there's a lot of grain grown in these parts. A considerable portion of the wheat and barley crop is exported, therefore contributing to our nation's gross national product as well as confirming the applicability of the term "the world's breadbasket" to Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

The wheat and barley crops also create jobs here at home, from the farmers who plant and harvest the crop to the mill workers who process the grain to the railroad employees who transport hoppers full of grain and on and on. People all over the world depend on the wheat and barley that's grown in Canada. Some depend on it as a way to earn a living, whereas others depend on it for flour with which to bake bread and other foodstuffs. So far so good, Mr.

Speaker. But how do these crops get from the farmers' fields to the consumers? Like so many other commodities, they're traded on the world markets, and this is where the picture loses its rosiness. The overarching principles that guide trade in North America are free trade and fair trade, enshrined first in the Canada/United States free trade agreement in 1989 and again in 1994 in the North American free trade agreement, or NAFTA, between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. But for the western Canadian wheat and barley farmer, trade is neither free nor fair. When it comes to wheat and barley, the CWB's mandate incorporates only Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba plus a small portion of British Columbia which, for all intents and purposes, can be considered an extension of Alberta's grainfields. This region is, in CWB vernacular, a designated area. Sadly, the tenets of NAFTA do not affect CWB.

5:20

Mr. Speaker, at the core of Bill 207 is a very clear purpose: to allow Alberta farmers to sell their wheat and barley crops as they choose. The Canadian Wheat Board, which first saw the light of day following the end of World War I, in 1918, is a dinosaur, a relic of the past. It has outlived its usefulness for Canadian farmers of wheat and barley and now mainly exists for its own sake. There's no denying the fact that there was a time when the CWB served a purpose, served it well, helping to defend our country. As part of the war effort there was ample justification to bestow upon the CWB the monopoly to trade the nation's grain harvest, but the war has been over for 57 years, yet the CWB's monopoly remains intact.

Mr. Speaker, what is the reason for this extended franchise? Why are our farmers not free to do business with whomever, whenever and however they see fit? Why should trading with someone other than the CWB result in criminal charges? There is little reason why this giant should be allowed to control the lives and livelihoods of western Canadian farmers any longer. On its own web site the CWB proudly proclaims itself the largest single exporter of wheat and barley in the world. It's only through the hard work of western Canadian farmers that the CWB is able to make claims like that.

However, Mr. Speaker, things now go from bad to worse. You see, other wheat-producing provinces are not subject to the CWB's mandate – that's right – whereas farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, along with that little portion of our western neighbour, must adhere to the CWB regulations every step of the way. Our counterparts elsewhere are not burdened by the same restrictions. While it's true that the CWB is the only agency in Canada that can issue export permits for wheat, wheat farmers in several other provinces are, generally speaking, free to sell to whomever they want, whenever they want. Why this discrepancy? The Alberta wheat and barley farmers and their counterparts in Saskatchewan and Manitoba have no option but to deal with the CWB. In Ontario farmers have choice. In New Brunswick there are alternatives. In

Quebec, in Nova Scotia, and on Prince Edward Island they have options. Why not Alberta? Options are what it comes down to. Alberta farmers have no options. It's the CWB or let the wheat and barley go unharvested and rot, lose millions of dollars, and quit farming.

There is another alternative, of course: break the law and sell the wheat directly to whomever you want, whenever you want. Of course, the RCMP will seize your truck and your farm, and you'll go to jail or at the very least be fined so heavily that you will no longer be able to stay in the business of farming. It's as if you can hear the CWB towering over the individual farmer booming: "Which do you choose? Will it be CWB or jail?" That's what's at the heart of the opposition to the monopoly of the CWB: the freedom to do business and the freedom to be able to engage in fair business dealings. That involves risk-taking; any business does. It's true that the CWB offers protection during difficult times by paying producers a higher price than they might otherwise get. However, Mr. Speaker, it's equally true that by imposing a variety of surcharges directly and indirectly and by restricting opportunities for Alberta farmers to engage in the free and fair trade of their wheat and barley crops, the CWB unfairly impedes the farmers' marketing opportunities. Moreover, doing so prevents the farmers from realizing the full commercial potential of their crops and especially during good times.

Mr. Speaker, passing Bill 207 would mark an important step in the direction of freeing the farmers of Alberta from the shackles of the Canadian Wheat Board. At last Alberta farmers would have the opportunity to engage in free and fair trade of the fruits of their labours. These are genuine concerns of mine and why I support Bill 207. Thank you.

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

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased today to rise and enter the debate on Bill 207. Inasmuch as the time is getting close, I would move that we adjourn debate, and I'll reserve my comments for another day.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In view of the hour I would move that we now call it 5:30 and that we reconvene at 8 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:26 p.m.]