

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Monday, May 13, 2002**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 02/05/13

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

THE SPEAKER: Good afternoon and welcome. Hon. members, I would ask you to please remain standing after the prayer for the singing of our national anthem.

Let us pray. Our Father, we thank You for Your abundant blessings to our province and ourselves. We ask You to ensure to us Your guidance and the will to follow it. Amen.

Now would you please participate in the singing of our national anthem in the language of your choice. We'll be led by Mr. Paul Lorieau.

HON. MEMBERS:

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

head: **Introduction of Guests**

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

MRS. TARCHUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to welcome a very special and distinguished group seated in the Speaker's gallery. They are called the CCAF fellows and are participants in a nine-month international fellowship program based in Ottawa. They are visiting us today as part of a weeklong tour of western Canada. The fellowship program is a collaboration between the office of the Auditor General of Canada, the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation, and the Auditor General of Quebec. The program is sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency and is designed to expand knowledge and understanding of public-sector accounting and auditing as practised in Canada. Fellows work with the audit teams, attend pertinent courses, and their experience is designed to help them address auditing issues in their home environment.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to now introduce Mr. Jashim Uddin from Bangladesh, Mr. Claudio Castello Branco from Brazil, Mr. Bachchu Dahal from Nepal, Mr. Abdoul Madjib Gueye from Senegal, Mr. Robert Cheyo from Tanzania, and Ms Hend Gongi from Tunisia. They are here today with Mrs. Donna Bigelow from the office of the Auditor General of Canada, Kimberley Speek from the CCAF, Lori Trudgeon and Dale Borrmann from the office of the Auditor General of Alberta. Again, they are seated in the Speaker's gallery, and I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MR. HORNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a gentleman seated in your gallery who is a constituent of mine and a friend. Our guest is also a councillor from Sturgeon county in the

Calahoo area. Mr. Paul Kolesar is also a buffalo rancher and is very interested in expanding Alberta's buffalo industry. I would ask Mr. Kolesar to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

MR. GOUDREAU: Mr. Speaker, it's also my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly a great group of energetic and dynamic grades 6 and 7 students from the Lloyd Garrison school of Berwyn. They're energetic because some of them had to get up at 4:45 this morning to drive down to be with us here this afternoon. Berwyn is approximately 500 kilometres northwest of here in the heart of the Peace country. This group is very special to me as it is the first school group that I've had the pleasure of introducing in the Legislature. They are seated in the public gallery, and they are accompanied by their teacher Mr. Rob Hoban and parent helpers Mrs. Davies, Mrs. Sukeroff, Mr. Shaw, Mrs. Reyda, and Mrs. Savoie. I would like them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. The first is a group of 21 students who are here from Keenooshayo elementary school in St. Albert. They are seated in the members' gallery, and they are another class of grade 6 students here at the Legislature for the week. They are accompanied by their teacher Mrs. Barb Hubbard and her assistant, Mrs. Ann Proulx, and by parent Mrs. Dawn Elhalabi. They are seated, as I said, in the members' gallery, and I'd ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

MR. KLEIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Brier Merrifield, who is seated in the members' gallery. Brier has recently begun working in my Calgary office at McDougall Centre as a summer student through the STEP program. Brier is a third-year student at the University of Calgary, and we are very pleased that she has joined us and has already proven very valuable on several projects. Brier, welcome. I hope that your experience with us this summer also proves to be both valuable and enjoyable. I would ask that she stand now and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two school groups to introduce this afternoon to you and through you to all hon. Members of this Legislative Assembly. The first one is from the north end of the Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency, and that's the Terrace Heights school. There are 20 fine and hardworking and capable students from Terrace Heights this afternoon visiting the Legislative Assembly. They are accompanied by Mr. Tom Jaques, teacher, and also by Mr. Rob MacLean and Mrs. Wendy Loney. They're in the public gallery, and I would now ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

Mr. Speaker, the second is a school group from the southern half of Edmonton-Gold Bar constituency, this time from St. Brendan school. There are 34 in total in the delegation from St. Brendan school. They are led by teachers Edwina Schwede, Shauna Smith, Jose Mendoza, and Jennifer Spearman. Also accompanying the group this afternoon are parent helpers Janine Campbell, Arlene

Thompson, Gloria Pigat, and Lori Rackel, who also is the volunteer president of the Ottewell Community League, one of the most progressive and largest community leagues in the entire city. These grades 5 and 6 students from St. Brendan are from one of Canada's greenest schools. I believe they're all in the public gallery, but some of them may be in the members' gallery. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

MS CALAHASEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the distinct pleasure of introducing a very special couple who are friends of mine. Jonathan and Allison Lorentzen have recently come from Slave Lake. In fact, they have been very active in the community, so active that they've been major supporters and volunteers of mine for the last three elections. He's one of the reasons I'm here today. After the 1997 election he was so pleased and he felt so lucky that he decided to marry Allison, one of the greatest joys of his life. They now live in Medicine Hat. They are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask that they rise and receive the warm welcome of this Legislature.

1:40

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

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The other introduction I'd like to make to you and through you to members of this Assembly is two very accomplished young women who live in St. Albert. Amy Venne, who manages the constituency office of St. Albert, is seated in the public gallery, and she is accompanied today by Laura Harrison, who is a third-year political science student at Carleton University in Ottawa but makes her home in St. Albert. They are seated in the gallery, and I would ask them both to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with pleasure I introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two individuals. The first is Pat Edmonds. Pat is the manager of the constituency office in Edmonton-Mill Woods and has been capably at that job since 1993. She's accompanied by Denise Varga. Denise is a social work student who's finding plenty of opportunity for her to practise her craft in our constituency. They're in the members' gallery, and with your permission I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

MS EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege and pleasure to introduce to you and this Assembly very special guests today. I have three groups. I'd first of all like to introduce the My Alberta contest winner from the Lesser Slave Lake constituency. She lives in High Prairie. Her mother works for Alberta Children's Services as an assistant manager. Her mother's name is Judy Delorme, and Danielle is with us. She did a picture of an Alberta rose that's exemplary. I'd ask her to stand with her mother. She's in the members' gallery. Look at that beautiful little girl. Thank you, and thank you, too, Mr. Speaker, for arranging to meet with them.

I'd also ask some very stalwart volunteers and mentors of mine in

Sherwood Park to stand. They are Donna Clarkson, Maggie Carr, Brenda Whitlock, June and Gordon Ash, Ed DeGrande, and Penny Young. They're here today to observe the proceedings in the Assembly. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I'd ask if they would stand and we'd give our warm and traditional welcome.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the 33 students from Archbishop Jordan have arrived yet, accompanied by teachers Yolande Joly as well as Audrey Gordey and parent Lorraine Forbes, but they are expected here this afternoon. If they would please stand if they're here. If they're not, I think they might be a little late.

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

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is also a pleasure for me to rise today and introduce two very capable people. They both work in my constituency office in Drayton Valley. One is my office assistant, Terri Johnston, and the other is my summer student under the STEP program. Her name is Jody Kok. She's here for the summer. I'd just like them both to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the House, please.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

MR. NORRIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce an old friend, but I say that in the kindest of terms. We've known each other since we were 10. That makes her about 22. I see her sitting in the members' gallery. Would Peggy Louis please rise and be recognized by the House. Give her the warm welcome she so rightly deserves.

head: **Oral Question Period**

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

Holy Cross Hospital

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has claimed time and again that the Holy Cross disposition committee operated at arm's length from the government. However, the Premier admitted last week to having met with the owners of Enterprise Universal Inc. about their bid to buy the Holy Cross hospital. My question is to the Premier. Is it normal practice for the Premier to meet with individuals who are in the midst of a bidding process on government assets?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I meet with thousands of people, literally, have met with thousands of people since I've become the Premier and before that as Minister of Environment, before that as the mayor of the city of Calgary. During bidding processes if there's a process in place, the message is simple: there is a process, fulfill the process, abide by the process, and fine. That's all there is to it, and I don't mind looking at any proposal at any particular time.

Mr. Speaker, what bothers me about this is that the Liberals do not have the courage to say directly – but they do it through implication, through innuendo – that there were some irregularities in the sale of the Holy Cross hospital site. They will never stand up in the House or outside the House and say what the problem is. You know, this is so typical of the Liberals. They try to sow the seeds of distrust and wrongdoing, and they have absolutely no evidence to support their innuendo.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Edmonton-Riverview and his left-wing friends at the Parkland Institute routinely produce flurries of paper, so-called academic papers in their vain efforts to discredit the

government. The member seems particularly obsessed with finding something evil in the work of the fine people of the Calgary regional health authority. If I may paraphrase a scholarly quote of my own: this sound and fury signify nothing. So far their efforts have only produced yawns and lawsuits.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader. [interjections] The hon. leader has the floor.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier tell the House whether or not at the meeting with the owners of Enterprise Universal they discussed the plans to use the site under contract with the CRHA for insured day surgery?

MR. KLEIN: I have no idea, Mr. Speaker. I recall vaguely seeing their proposal and saying: "Lookit; there's a process in place. Go to the disposition committee and take it up with the RHA. Interesting proposal."

Mr. Speaker, this type of dirty politics has hurt the Liberals in the past – and we've seen that; that's why there are seven over there and 74 over here – and it will continue to hurt them. Albertans have shown time and time again that they don't like the politics of personal mudslinging.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Did the Premier take any actions on behalf of Enterprise Universal after that meeting?

MR. KLEIN: No.

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

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In complete contradiction to what the Premier said last week, the confidential report made by the disposition committee for the Holy Cross says that the Holy Cross site "was not to assume any ongoing financial or contractual support from the CRHA . . . The 'health care' usage could not be insured services under the Canada Health Act." Yet within weeks of the sale the new owners were being paid by the CRHA to conduct procedures insured under the Canada Health Act. None of the other bidders were told that this was possible. To the Premier: did the Premier's meeting with Enterprise Universal have anything to do with the terms of the bidding and contract being changed?

MR. KLEIN: No.

DR. NICOL: To the Premier: why was one bid given preferential treatment over the others?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know. Again I defer to the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, who was a city councillor at the time, was on the bid committee. I'm advised that there were something like 12 proposals received, that the disposition committee was made up of someone appointed by the mayor of the city of Calgary, appointments from the RHA. Former Bishop O'Byrne was on the committee, as I understand, and a number of community people. They adjudicated all of the proposals. As I understand, it was advertised nationally. The proposal that was eventually accepted was the best proposal received. As a matter of fact, I'm informed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie that in one case the proponent actually asked the RHA to pay the proponent to take the site off his

hands. So it seems to me that there was hardly a tremendous effort on the part of the proponents to pay what the Liberals say was the appraised value at that particular time.

1:50

THE SPEAKER: The hon. leader.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. How can the Premier justify a process where one set of rules was used during the bidding and those rules were then ignored once a successful bidder was announced?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I don't know the details following the sale of the land and the arrangements that were made between the RHA and the proponents, nor do I get involved in that kind of detail. Unfortunately, the House rules don't permit me to ask the minister at the time to comment. This goes back six years, and I have no idea – no idea – what arrangements were made between the RHA and the successful proponents. All I can say is that there's been a review of this particular situation. Everything was found to be aboveboard, but again I will ask the Liberals: if they have an accusation to make, then make it. Make the accusation. You know, show the courage and stand up and make an accusation of wrongdoing, but do it outside the House, because you know, there's already one lawsuit against one of the hon. members relative to one of the proponents associated with this issue. Perhaps there might be more. Who knows?

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Legislation and policy are clear. Regional health authorities are not under the jurisdiction of the Ethics Commissioner, yet last week the Premier told this Assembly that conflict of interest rules for RHAs "come under the purview of the Ethics Commissioner of this province." That is not true. To the Premier: why did the Premier tell this Assembly that RHAs come under the Ethics Commissioner when surely he knows that is not true?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I stand to be corrected, but I thought that we had amended the guidelines to put RHAs, municipalities, school boards, and so on under the same rules of ethics and FOIP that we're under.

DR. TAFT: Given that RHAs are – and I've confirmed this with the Ethics Commissioner – beyond the jurisdiction of the Ethics Commissioner, can the Premier tell the Assembly if it is a conflict of interest for the leader of the successful bid for the Holy Cross to be simultaneously an official with the RHA selling the property?

MR. KLEIN: I have no idea, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness is not here. I don't know who's responsible. [interjection] Well, I'll have the hon. acting minister respond. Maybe he can shed some light on this.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not intimately familiar with the exact question that is being asked by the member, but I will undertake on behalf of the Minister of Health and Wellness to ensure that he receives a proper answer as soon as possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Premier admit that well-connected Tories got the inside track on the bidding for the Holy Cross?

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, there was a process. I've gone through the process a dozen times. A dozen times. I don't know if the disposition committee knew that the proponents – first of all, to set the stage, about 70 percent of the people in this province are Tory supporters. Thank God. It goes without saying that all I can meet with are 30 percent of the people. You know, about 15 or 20 percent of those would be Liberals and the others NDs, and who knows where the others are from. That means I can't meet with any of our supporters. I think it's very, very fortunate that we have so many supporters in this province, and I apologize to no one for meeting with our supporters. As a matter of fact, as I said, I've had thousands of meetings since I've been in this government, and I would imagine that the vast majority of those people would be our supporters.

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

Security Management Legislation

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow, after 37 days, the government is pulling the plug on one of the shortest spring sittings in recent memory. The government has decided to wait until the final day of this very short session to introduce a bill that deals with as yet unspecified threats to security in this province. My questions are to the Premier. Will this legislation help actually do anything to increase the security of Albertans?

THE SPEAKER: Whoa. It's kind of hard to ask questions about something that is yet to be introduced, and I just put that caveat on any kind of response here. The Legislature has not seen such a bill that I'm aware of.

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, you're absolutely correct. A bill has not been tabled. It's on the Order Paper, I'm advised, for tomorrow. Notwithstanding the intention to table the bill that to my knowledge will be a bill that will introduce a number of minor amendments, I believe, housekeeping kinds of things, there have been a number of steps taken from a policy point of view to address the events and the security of this province post September 11. Indeed, there have been ongoing discussions led by the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. The Solicitor General has been involved with various phases of industry, authorities responsible for security, and generally, as I understand it, security has been beefed up or the issue has been addressed in a very significant and in a very serious manner.

If you wish, Mr. Speaker, I can have the hon. Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations supplement.

THE SPEAKER: No.
Proceed.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since this legislation was supposed to respond to the events of September 11 and the subsequent events, why has it taken the government so long to enact such legislation, especially since it won't be passed until November 2002 at the earliest?

MR. JONSON: Mr. Speaker, it is quite correct that we have been working on legislation suitable for the needs of Alberta with respect

to security, and I acknowledge the leader of the third party's point, and that is that it is a piece of legislation which will probably take some time to discuss and to have before the public for reaction, but that has been the case with all governments tackling the whole issue of security as far as the legislative framework is concerned that is best for a province or for a country. We want to make sure that the legislation we put in place will do the job in the long term. Unfortunately, the whole issue of there being a concern and a risk as far as security is concerned is something that is not going away within the next few months. We're in it for the long term, and we want to have the best legislation possible.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. PANNU: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary is to the Premier. Will there be any erosion of the civil liberties or privacy rights of Albertans as a result of the government's antiterrorist legislation, and if so, in what ways?

2:00

MR. KLEIN: Mr. Speaker, I think it's sort of stretching it a bit, to say the least, to say that this is antiterrorism legislation. Certainly the bill speaks to boosting security and making some amendments, some adjustments to the way we do things, but it is hardly an antiterrorist bill. I believe that has been addressed by the federal government.

No, Mr. Speaker, to answer the question, it will not in any way, shape, or form violate the civil rights of Albertans or other Canadians for that matter.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Agricultural Policy Framework

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's and Canada's agriculture and agrifood sectors are key contributors to the high quality of life enjoyed by citizens across our province and country. Lately I've been reading and hearing reports about the development of a new agricultural policy framework that is being worked on by the federal and provincial governments. I understand that there was an announcement made at the conclusion of the meeting on the development of a formal agreement on this framework. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. Can the minister advise us on the progress of the framework and how it will positively impact producers?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the agricultural policy framework certainly is a work in progress. It began in Whitehorse last June with agreement from all of the provinces, territories, and federal government that there were five chapters that we needed to work on. Those were food safety and quality, environment, sector renewal, risk management, and science and research, all vital to the sustainability of this industry. I'm pleased to say that at our meetings last Monday and Tuesday in Ottawa we reached agreement on those chapters and have asked our officials to do some final work, which we believe will lead to the signing of an umbrella framework at the end of June in our official meetings.

I think the U.S. farm bill, the actions of that speak very much to the need for this agricultural policy framework for this country and certainly for our province to take this industry into the future. Mr. Speaker, critical to that will be the chapter on safety nets and risk management. Our producers don't like ad hoc programs. Governments don't like ad hoc programs. We like predictability and

sustainability, and we believe that this agricultural policy framework will lay out a road map for this important industry and for the future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: can you expand on the five chapters and their progress and benefits?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Well, Mr. Speaker, there's no question that all five chapters are very important to the industry. I've mentioned risk management and safety nets, but I think that food safety is one of critical interest to all Canadians, in fact to all people who receive our quality produce. We have a reputation in Canada for producing a very high-quality, safe food, and we want to build on that reputation. We believe that we can brand Canada as a safe, reliable source of food.

The other sector that I'll just mention, Mr. Speaker, although they're all important, is science and innovation. Actually, the reason that our agricultural industry has been so successful and is now an \$18 billion contributor to this province's economy annually is largely due to science and research. This has allowed our producers to introduce new crops, new technologies, new processing methods, which has led it to be the largest single manufacturing sector in this province. So we encourage further work in that area, and we're working very closely with the Minister of Innovation and Science in our province for an agricultural research strategy for Alberta.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplemental to the same minister: who is responsible for the monetary support for this new framework?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, the risk management safety net side of it is already funded pretty well in whole. There may be some adjustments in that area. We are having discussions with the federal government on the other four chapters. Certainly it has been recognized by the federal government that programs that we have in place will be recognized and can be recognized as a sharing. For example, in the environment the agricultural environmental sustainability initiative has done great work. We have worked through the CARD program. We've increased our funding in food safety in this province in each of the last two budgets, and we expect that to be recognized. Traditionally the funding has been 60-40; 60 federal, 40 provincial. We don't see that changing, and we'll work out the details on funding after June.

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

Education Funding

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To protest the underfunding of schools, parents in Banff, Canmore, and Exshaw are considering withdrawing their children from provincial achievement tests. They would join 50 parents in Calgary who have made the same threat. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why are parents being forced to such extremes to have their funding concerns addressed?

DR. OBERG: Well, Mr. Speaker, over the past couple of weeks we just passed the budget – I believe it's in third reading today – which saw a huge increase into the Department of Learning of roughly 4

and a half to 5 percent that was increased in the Department of Learning budget. So when it comes to funding, the school boards have received 3 percent on their general grant this year plus a guarantee for teachers' salaries. So there is the money there.

With respect to the specific concern about parents withdrawing their kids from achievement tests, I would just put it out to the parents that I really would urge you not to hold your kids hostage in this. The achievement tests are something that is excellent for kids. It helps us to improve our curriculum, Mr. Speaker. We have the number one curriculum and the number one school system in the world and part of that obviously because of the teachers and the students, but part of that is also due to the achievement tests, where we continually look at the curriculum. So I caution the parents not to do that when ultimately it's their kids that will suffer if that occurs.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It doesn't make sense. If there's money available, why are parents taking such drastic action?

DR. OBERG: Well, I agree with you: it doesn't make sense. I think it does not make sense to hold their kids hostage in situations like this. I don't think it makes sense to cause the kids to not have an improved curriculum. Mr. Speaker, it is quite unfortunate. I agree with the member: it just doesn't make sense.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

DR. MASSEY: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: has the minister threatened to disband parent councils who participate in the protest?

DR. OBERG: No.

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

Landlord/Tenant Legislation

MR. MASZYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of my constituents who is a landlord has brought to my attention the frustration he's having with the length of time it's taking to have a tenant evicted. My question is to the Minister of Government Services. What recourse is available to landlords in a situation where they are finding it difficult to evict a tenant in a timely manner?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. COUTTS: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly am aware of some of the concerns around the cost and the timeliness of the eviction process in terms of landlord/tenant disputes, particularly when you have a difficult or maybe an unruly tenant. I certainly can appreciate the frustrations that are put forward by landlords. But that being said, the legislation that we have in place serves both landlords and tenants, and it's called the Residential Tenancies Act. It sets out the rights and the responsibilities of both landlords and tenants in this particular province.

What we do have are some mechanisms that landlords can use if there has been what they feel is a breach of the contract or a breach of the landlord/tenants act. It gives a landlord the opportunity to go through Provincial Court rather than the conventional Court of Queen's Bench so that it can be speeded up and get an eviction

notice out. However, they do have to let the tenant know that an eviction notice is coming, and it gives the tenant an opportunity to write back and voice their objections.

2:10

As well, I should point out that there is a lawyer referral service that can provide the names of lawyers that your constituent could consult, and the first half hour of that service is free to tenants. There are other mechanisms such as alternative dispute mechanisms that can be used, but, Mr. Speaker, most of the landlord/tenant disputes can be referred to our office so that people can really find out what the landlord/tenant act is all about and what their rights and responsibilities are.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. MASYK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. My constituents believe that the balance is tipped in favour of the tenants. Are there any plans to bring new legislation to protect the rights of the landlords?

Thank you.

MR. COUTTS: That is a very good question, Mr. Speaker. I want to point out for the hon. member that Government Services gets a lot of complaints about the landlord/tenant act from landlords and tenants alike. What we find is that landlords think that tenants have all the rights and tenants think that landlords have all the rights. So what we're doing is we're currently reviewing our Residential Tenancies Act in Alberta today. We've gone through a research stage where we're looking at various landlord/tenant situations across Canada, and we're taking that information and putting it together along with our own Residential Tenancies Act, that is presently in place, and looking at ways that we can upgrade it to facilitate landlord/tenant disputes.

We'll be going out with a consultation very, very shortly this summer. That consultation will look for input from both landlords and from tenants. What I'd like to point out to the hon. member and to all members of the House is that currently there are about one million renters in this province, and of those one million renters, the few complaints that we do have coming in in comparison to the amount of renters that are out there show me that in Alberta today the majority of tenants and the majority of landlords really understand their roles and responsibilities to the act and the legislation as well as to their communities. So I'm very, very pleased at the fact that there are so few problems, considering the numbers of people that we have renting.

MR. MASYK: My final question is to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. How would my constituents get involved with the review?

MR. COUTTS: Mr. Speaker, certainly we'd like to see landlords and tenants get involved with the consultation, and when the consultation paper becomes available, I'll make sure that all constituency offices have a copy of it. As well, particularly you can get the consultation review to your constituent so that he or she may be able to get involved as well as any constituents that you have in the constituency that have had difficulties in the past with understanding landlord/tenant disputes or the Residential Tenancies Act. We'll make sure that that is available and publicized throughout the province.

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

Electricity Pricing

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just as Enron, an enthusiastic promoter of electricity deregulation, was a spectacular failure, so too was this government's expensive electricity deregulation scheme. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Why did the government decide to go to marginal pricing, where the last highest bid for electricity sets the price for all bids, rather than stay with incremental cost dispatching, where power is brought on in the cheapest, most cost-efficient way possible?

Thank you.

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, the policy is a matter of record.

MR. MacDONALD: Again to the same minister: why did the minister choose a pricing system that favours generators over one that favours consumers while still providing generators with a healthy profit?

MR. SMITH: Well, Mr. Speaker, I was just looking at the average Power Pool price for 2001. The January price average is 13.1 cents, a cumulative 2001 average of 7.1. The price to date, 2002, 3.8 cents a kilowatt-hour. When you have prices cut in half, it's very hard for me to believe that a generator would benefit from that. So what has to happen is there have to be pathways and choices for consumers to be able to access the same price points that wholesalers are able to offer in the Power Pool. Also, with large companies and large industrials, for the price that they purchase power at, we should be able to have everyday consumers purchase power at that same price.

Mr. Speaker, that's very much a part of what we're working on today with the individual transmission companies, who have the regulated side to offer, as well as the generators and the utility companies that offer this and the great number of stakeholder and consultation groups that the government has used to get through this policy of deregulation. That has resulted in lower prices overall, and it certainly prevented any type of blackout from ever occurring in this province.

MR. MacDONALD: To the same minister: if prices are lower overall, when will the consumers see on their bill the \$345 million that's currently outstanding in the Balancing Pool deferral account? When are you going to add that to their bill?

MR. SMITH: Mr. Speaker, we are not going to add that to their bill. The member clearly knows that the Balancing Pool, that was around during regulated times, is also around in deregulation. In fact, that entity gets money from the sale of the power that it manages as well as incurred the costs when regulated, inefficient power was running. That's also added to their cost. It's a very public process. Those documents are available in the public domain, and in fact it's simply an equation of money in, money out, which makes for either a rebate, which would be a surplus measure, or a negative number, which would be a deferral account.

Mr. Speaker, this process was a culmination of some eight years of consultation with consumers, with generators, with utilities, and with other members of the Alberta public. We do know that competition has the ability to lower prices or certainly lower the increase in prices. If in fact we would have been under the regulated model, we would have had to spend in excess of \$4 billion just to bring the power that's here today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry.

Zero Tolerance Policy in Provincial Parks

MR. RENNER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the past 15 to 20 years a growing popular trend has seen camping trips during the May long weekend become the unofficial kickoff for high school graduation celebrations in my area. Out of concern with the increasing rowdiness in provincial campgrounds and to ensure the safety of both young people and other campground users, park officials instituted a zero tolerance policy on enforcement of alcohol-related offences last year within Cypress Hills provincial park. My questions today are to the Minister of Community Development. Can the minister advise what analysis has been conducted within the provincial parks administration to determine the effectiveness of last year's clamp-down on campground activities?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. We're all aware of the upcoming grad season and the desire of young people to get out and explore our wonderful parks areas. I'm sure that numerous people will be visiting the very beautiful area in the Elkwater region. But to directly answer the question, we have done some analyses and reviews of the zero tolerance program which the hon. member refers to, and it will tell us information with respect to rowdy behaviour, what has worked and what perhaps has not worked to curb that type of behaviour, and also with respect to safety and precautionary measures that worked very effectively last year. I just want to say that the parks staff are working very closely out there on these reviews with local RCMP, the city of Medicine Hat police, Red Cross volunteers, and with the mobile unit people. So there's quite a bit of information that has been comparatively looked at, and it appears that the zero tolerance policy has been quite effective.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RENNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What feedback if any has the government received regarding the zero tolerance policy?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Mr. Speaker, in a general sense the feedback that we've been receiving as a result of zero tolerance in the area referred to has been very positive. We've heard from students who used the park facilities last year. We've heard from the counselors and teachers and parents and other uninvolved parties such as day and night parks visitors, and all of those analyses and all of those results indicate that we're on the right track there. We want to ensure the safety of our users and of the students in particular in this case, so we're very pleased with the feedback that we've been receiving. Overall, hon. member, you would be pleased to know that we've seen a decrease in the total number of incident-related activities.

2:20

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. RENNER: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. My final question: does the government intend to pursue the same zero tolerance policy again this year?

MR. ZWOZDESKY: The short answer, Mr. Speaker, is yes. We will be following the same procedure. In fact, we'll be stepping it up a little bit. Again we will be sending notices out – and some have gone out, I understand – to the schools in the area, to the students, and to the parents. We'll be doing some infomercials on local media outlets. There will be talk show appearances to highlight this particular circumstance. In the end, from our point of view as Community Development and responsible for parks and protected

areas, we'll be increasing the number of conservation officers and again will be working on this zero tolerance policy very closely with the Check Stop people, the local RCMP, and other highway maintenance individuals so that we ensure a very safe and a very enjoyable experience for the students, the parents, and other park users.

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

Temporary Employment Agencies

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and this government should have a greater appreciation and sense of urgency for the plight of the homeless and the poor. They are, after all, the last to share in the benefits of Alberta's current economic growth. One such group that has been left to the ravages of the streets are those who visit labour exchanges for temporary employment. Some of these labour exchanges are unfairly capitalizing on people who seek a way out of poverty and unemployment. To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: given that temporary workers may be sent to jobsites for which they are hastily prepared, will the minister review workplace safety training at temporary employment agencies?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that will be yes. I'm glad that the member has raised this particular issue. We're about to embark on a huge initiative here in the province to reduce workplace injuries by 40 percent. Of course, whether it's permanent or temporary work, if somebody is injured on the work site, then they come into our system, so we want to deal with it.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: will the minister explain why the government allows temporary employment agencies to charge a worker who leaves an unsafe work site with the cost of bringing another labourer to that same site?

MR. DUNFORD: The hon. member will have to send me details on the issue, Mr. Speaker. I don't know the answer to that specific question as we are here today.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. BONNER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that a temporary employee who leaves a work site for any reason, including unsafe conditions, may be denied payment for hours already worked, will the minister review the business practices of temporary employment agencies?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, we have employment standards in place. Of course, it's always contemplated under that legislation that if someone is working and an agreement has been made as to the rate of pay and the work is done, then that rate of pay should be forwarded. I would indicate to the hon. member and to other members here in the House that if they are aware of those kinds of situations, we have employment standards offices around the province. As a matter of fact, we have a call centre that actually handles an incredible number of calls each and every year, and we're very proud of that information we're providing. So restitution is available if we hear about the specific cases.

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

Programs Review

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last July and August a five-person committee of MLAs consulted extensively on low-income programs. Holding these consultations last summer was justified because the government said that there was some urgency to address concerns about the inadequacy of these programs. How times and priorities change. The Minister of Human Resources and Employment has had the two reports since last October, and they've been buried ever since in a great, deepening pile of dust on his desk. To the minister of Human Resources and Employment: why is the minister attempting to evade the scrutiny of the Legislature by delaying the release of the low-income review until the session is over?

MR. DUNFORD: Mr. Speaker, one report is titled *What We Heard*, and the other report that apparently has found its way into the public domain through some sort of technique – I'm never sure how it happens – is called *What We Recommend*. The government response has to go with that MLA recommendation. We've made it a matter of process in this particular case that all three reports would be released at the same time. As much as the hon. member knows how capable I am in these situations, we have run into a couple of wrinkles, and we're not going ahead with it until we're satisfied that we have the government response. Also, I want to assure the hon. member that just in case – just in case – the leak came from anywhere near his domain, I will not change my agenda because of leaked documents.

MR. MASON: How convenient, Mr. Speaker.

Why doesn't the minister tell the Assembly before it adjourns for the season if he's going to accept or reject key recommendations of the MLA committee such as adjusting shelter allowances to market levels or using a market-basket approach to ensure that AISH and social assistance recipients can afford increases in the cost of living? There are many people in dire straits that have been waiting months and months and months for this, Minister.

MR. DUNFORD: In answer to the specific question the answer will be yes; we will be accepting some of the recommendations. We will be accepting other recommendations in principle, and we'll be modifying other of those recommendations. When we release all three reports, certainly it'll have the indication for each and every recommendation with it.

MR. MASON: How enlightening, Mr. Speaker.

This is to the Deputy Premier. Since Albertans had expected government action not only on the low-income programs review but also on the expert panel on delisting health services, the ambulance services review, and the adjudication of long-standing WCB claims, why is this government showing disdain for this Legislature by putting off these political hot potatoes until the Legislature has finished sitting?

MRS. McCLELLAN: Mr. Speaker, contrary to the methods that the third party might use, we look to having good consultations, making sure that we understand the issues, and having an appropriate response before we come out with these issues.

Mr. Speaker, the ambulance report was mentioned. This is a very complex area. It involves private ambulances. It involves municipal ambulances. It also involves some volunteer areas, and some hospital ambulances probably are still operating. It's important, when we take these issues on, that we approach them through the

consultation process and that when we have recommendations, we give those recommendations the courtesy of a thorough airing and discussion and respond with appropriate recommendations. This government has a history of doing that, and we will do it in all of these cases.

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

Future Summit Report

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents, the people of Wetaskiwin-Camrose, played an important part in the Alberta Future Summit 2002 consultation as I held two successful MLA forums in both communities last fall. I've been asked by many of these people for an update on what is going on with the Future Summit following the February 4 and 5 gathering in Red Deer. My question is to the Minister of Revenue. As co-chair of this public consultation initiative when do you expect the Future Summit final report on those strategies and ideas for action Albertans deliberated over to be presented to government?

2:30

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose is right. He participated substantially throughout the process of the Future Summit consultation last fall and through Red Deer on February 4 and 5 of this year. As well, many of the members of this House have participated as well as Albertans all across this province. It's been an outstanding process. We anticipate that the report should be delivered to us by the end of May. It was co-chaired by the Alberta Economic Development Authority and the government. Doug Mitchell, the other co-chair, and I will be looking forward to receiving that report in the last week of May.

MR. JOHNSON: To the same minister. As one of the publicized recommendations from the Future Summit was that government should establish some sort of revenue-balancing or leveling fund, can the minister give us an idea if government has examined this strategy?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. MELCHIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were many great strategies articulated by delegates at the Future Summit. We look forward to getting the report so that we could look at those recommendations in more detail. We can say, though, in respect to that one concept of stability and sustainability and predictability of revenues and a stabilization fund or otherwise that we have been examining a revenue framework inside the Department of Revenue over the past year. There's also one other committee that's very instrumental in this; that's the Financial Management Commission, that's been appointed by the Minister of Finance, that's looking at some of these accounting and financial issues. We look forward to both of those reports in the near future.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. To the same minister. Skeptics would say that this report could end up on the shelf collecting dust. How are you going to ensure that this doesn't happen?

MR. MELCHIN: Mr. Speaker, it's been the commitment from this government and certainly from Premier Klein at the onset when this Future Summit consultation process was put out that we will review and act upon the strategies. We will take part. We will commit to a full response by government this fall. We're looking forward to having a chance to review it amongst our processes. But it doesn't stop just with the government; this is part of all Albertans. It's going to be everybody in all Alberta participating in the future and the formulation of those policies.

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

Grizzly Bear Protection

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1997 I have been asking questions in this Assembly about the protection of grizzly bears. Each time the minister responsible assured Albertans that the government was monitoring and studying but made no commitment to action. Let's see if the government can improve on its record today. My questions are to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Will the minister upgrade the status of the grizzly bear from "may be at risk" to "threatened with extirpation," as recommended by the Endangered Species Conservation Committee?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. minister.

MR. CARDINAL: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That's a very important question. The recommendations from the conservation committee, which is chaired by the Member for West Yellowhead, I just received a while ago in my office. We're reviewing the recommendations, and I am in the process of forwarding a letter to the member indicating some of the changes that we'll be looking at in relation to that report.

In relation to the grizzly bear situation, Mr. Speaker, there are about a thousand grizzly bears in Alberta and another 40,000 grizzly bears in B.C., adjacent to Alberta. We have a well-managed hunting season for grizzly bears. Out of the thousand there are only about 15 taken out each year. This is something we need to monitor very closely. It is critical. It has to be monitored because one of the dangers of the wildlife out there today – and a lot of us may not be aware of it – is that a lot of the animals become too tame and urbanized, which in turn is creating a major problem to our urban centres and also to the public out there as far as safety. So I believe that a balanced hunt and a balanced protection of animals is necessary for the benefit of the animals also, not only the public.

MS CARLSON: Mr. Speaker, will the minister make a commitment to reviewing and upgrading the status by the end of May, which is what the committee has been requesting?

MR. CARDINAL: No, Mr. Speaker. Again, you know, the Liberal way would be just to close it, to just close everything down. That's the way the Liberals go. We don't do that. What I said earlier is very, very important, that in order to keep our wild animals healthy and productive, we need to make sure they remain wild. What has happened in the past 10, 15 years is that a lot of our wild animals, including deer, elk, moose, cougar, wolf, and coyotes and other animals, have become too tame and are now in conflict with the public. In fact, with deer and elk alone last year there were 6,000 accidents with cars. Now, there is something wrong with our system. That is why it's so critical that we study the area, monitor the area, and make the proper decisions.

MS CARLSON: All these years and still no commitment.

Mr. Speaker, given that the minister stated earlier in this Assembly that he will be immediately initiating recovery plans for the grizzly bears, will he make those plans public and table them in the Legislature?

MR. CARDINAL: All I'm saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the recovery plan has to be flexible. Protecting animals the way we've protected animals here the last 15 or 20 years has worked to a certain extent. In fact, maybe it's worked too well. The animals have become too tame, and we have too many on our roadways, too many on our farms, and too many in towns wandering all over amongst the people. So there has to be a balance. It's very important that the animals remain wild for their protection.

head: Recognitions

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

Dr. Linda Pilarski

MRS. O'NEILL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 5, 2002, Dr. Linda Pilarski was awarded the prestigious Cinader award at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Immunology in Blue Mountain, Ontario. The Cinader award, the top immunology award in Canada, is given annually in recognition of excellence in scientific research and contributions to the field of immunology, the study of the white blood cells that protect our bodies against infections.

Dr. Pilarski, a resident of Spring Lake, is professor of oncology at the University of Alberta and senior scientist at the Cross Cancer Institute. She previously received the YWCA woman of distinction award in science and technology as well as a McCalla professorship and a Killam professorship from the University of Alberta. She has published over 150 papers in scientific journals. Dr. Pilarski and her colleagues are currently working in the field of nanobiotechnology, the science of the very, very small; in this case, manipulation of individual molecules from individual cells to design devices able to provide rapid automated testing for genetic abnormalities in aggressive cancer cells.

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

Grant MacEwan Literary Awards

MS DeLONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the recipients of the Grant MacEwan author's award and the Grant MacEwan young writer's scholarships, who were honoured at the 2002 Alberta book awards on May 11. It was my pleasure to attend this event on behalf of the Minister of Community Development.

The Grant MacEwan literary awards were launched by the Alberta government in recognition of the late Dr. Grant MacEwan and his achievement in literary excellence. A prominent writer, politician, and historian, Dr. MacEwan was very involved with the development of culture and education in Alberta, and the awards help to nurture Alberta's literary talent in the spirit of this legacy. Every year an author's award of \$25,000 is presented to an Alberta writer for a book that is reflective of Alberta and Dr. MacEwan's interests, and scholarships of \$2,500 are presented to four young Alberta writers for essays of the same criteria.

There was a tie for the Grant MacEwan author's award, and the winners were Ken McGoogan of Calgary for *Fatal Passage* and Aritha van Herk of Calgary for *Mavericks*. The young writer's scholarships winners are Sarah Beamish of Edmonton, Timothy J.G. Cole of Calgary, Lindsay Stamhuis of Edmonton, and Brenna D. Wilson of Edmonton.

Thank you.

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

2:40

Alberta Cattle Commission

MR. JACOBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and give recognition and congratulations today to the Alberta Cattle Commission for being a winner of the 2002 international gold quill awards announced by the International Association of Business Communicators, sponsored by Mercer Human Resource Consulting. "We are honoured to receive this award, especially with it being an international award where we were judged against entries from around the world," says Joanne Lemke, Alberta Cattle Commission manager of public affairs. The Alberta Cattle Commission captured a gold quill excellence award for the refreshed If It Ain't Alberta, It Ain't Beef image campaign presenting real women from the industry, the RancHERS, as ambassadors for Alberta beef. "It was a total team effort, involving our staff, our promotion committee of cattle producers, our agency partner Communication Incorporated, and of course the RancHERS," adds Lemke.

The Alberta Cattle Commission was specifically acknowledged for media relations and the profile created by the Alberta beef campaign. The campaign competed among other projects in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Croatia, England, Hong Kong, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Slovenia, South Africa, Switzerland, and the United States. Winners will be honoured at a gala banquet on June 10, and winning work plans will be on display during the International Association of Business Communicators 2002 international conference.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, you can have two minutes.

Vaisakhi Day

MS CARLSON: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize the Edmonton Sikh community, who celebrated Vaisakhi day with a religious parade through the streets of Mill Woods on Saturday. Vaisakhi, the birthday of Khalsa, comes about this time of spring. It's close to the Christian festival of Easter and Jewish Passover, both festivals celebrating spring, goodwill, and new beginnings. Vaisakhi, traditionally on April 13, is a traditional harvest seasonal festival of northern India. The harvesting of wheat is started at this time and is considered a harbinger of wealth and prosperity. It is important and celebrated by all communities in India, but within Sikhism it has special significance. On this day the Tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, created the order of Khalsa.

Thousands of people lined the streets in Mill Woods on Saturday between Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha on Gurdwara road and Gurdwara Mill Woods to witness hundreds of participants, and the parade included sword-fighting demonstrations, music, and floats. We congratulate the community and particularly the organizers on the successful completion of the fourth annual Nagar Kirtan parade.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Stettler.

Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month

MRS. GORDON: Thank you. May is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month. Canada has one of the highest rates of MS in the world with Alberta having the highest prevalence in all of Canada, and closer to where I live, one of the neurologists practising in Red Deer estimates, between eight and 10 David Thompson health region residents are diagnosed with MS each month. Although the cause of MS is unknown, its course unpredictable, and its cure is as yet

undiscovered, many exciting strides have been made. We now have some exciting new drug therapies that are helping considerably, particularly those afflicted with the relapsing/remitting type of MS. The MS Society continues to be a leader in funding much-needed MS research in Canada. However, as this research is very expensive, fund-raising is necessary. Many fund-raising events will be held across Alberta this month and next – bike tours, super city walking tours, charity golf tournaments, and of course the annual carnation campaign – where dollars raised could well blossom into a cure. As honorary spokesperson for the central Alberta chapter, whose bike tour will be held on June 22 and 23, it is contingent upon me to encourage you, your family, and your friends to participate in one of these most worthwhile events. MS lives here. Can we count on you?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Dr. Stuart Iglesias

MR. STRANG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to recognize one of my constituents, Dr. Stuart Iglesias, a Hinton area physician, who is the first recipient of the new rural physician distinction in practice award. Sponsored by the government's Alberta rural physician action plan, the rural physician distinction in practice award honours all rural physicians who provide outstanding medical service to Alberta's rural communities every day.

Dr. Iglesias was selected as the 2002 recipient for his superb contribution to rural medicine, rural anesthesiology, and obstetrics. Aside from running a busy family practice for the past 18 years and teaching family medicine at the University of Alberta, Dr. Iglesias has also found time to volunteer for a number of community organizations.

Dr. Iglesias will receive his award June 19 at a celebration cohosted by the Alberta rural physician action plan and the Hinton community. I'd ask all to join me in recognizing Dr. Stuart Iglesias, recipient of the rural physician distinction in practice award.

Thank you.

Beverly Towne Community Development Society

MR. MASON: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize an outstanding organization in my constituency of Edmonton-Highlands. The Beverly Towne Community Development Society are recipients of the Solicitor General's community crime prevention award. Beverly Towne Community Development operates the youth options program, an initiative that identifies the needs of youth at risk and provides them with alternatives, those being recreational activities.

Colleen Fiddler and Lorne Demchuk, two staff members, develop activities such as a summer golf program, a Friday night basketball program, and a number of others. As well, they oversee the youth council, who has taken on some interesting projects: a community garden project and a toxic materials roundup day. My congratulations to them for receiving this award and for the fine work they are doing in Edmonton-Highlands.

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 82 Albertans petitioning the Legislative Assembly to urge the government to not delist services, raise health care premiums, introduce user fees, or further privatize the health care system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

THE CLERK: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 37.1(2) I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited today with the office of the Clerk by the hon. Minister of Revenue: responses to questions raised on April 24, 2002, Department of Revenue, 2002-2003 Committee of Supply debate.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. BOUTILIER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to table the requisite number of copies of the Safety Codes Council annual report for the year 2001 as well as a commentary by the chair of the Safety Codes Council, Dr. Ken Sauer.

MR. DOERKSEN: Mr. Speaker, I also want to table copies of the 2000-2001 annual report of the Alberta Ingenuity Fund, which of course is the trade name of the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Science and Engineering Research. As usual, Members of the Legislative Assembly and all Albertans can get additional copies on the worldwide web at albertaingenuity.ca.

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

MR. DUNFORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table with the Assembly the responses to questions that were asked during the estimates on April 11 that I was unable to answer at that particular time. We now have the written answers.

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

MR. LORD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a memo addressed to the government members' research team.

Thank you.

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

MR. McCLELLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the Minister of Community Development to table with the House five copies of a document from Human Resources and Workers' Compensation Consulting regarding Bill 26.

Thank you.

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

MR. MARZ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. One is from the town of Carstairs and the other is from the town of Didsbury. They are both resolutions of nonsupport for the Kyoto protocol, and the appropriate number of copies are all here.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table copies of 87 letters from people who want the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development to adopt the recommendations of the Endangered Species Conservation Committee regarding grizzly bear protection.

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

DR. TAFT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to table the

appropriate number of copies of what I think is an enormously important document brought to my attention by a constituent. It's a new physician charter that was simultaneously published in February in both the *Lancet* and the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. It was developed through an international effort including the European Federation of Internal Medicine, the American Board of Internal Medicine, the American Society of Internal Medicine, and the American College of Physicians, and I recommend it to anybody who's interested in health care.

Thank you.

2:50

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make two tablings today. They are both letters. I have appropriate copies of the first letter that's written by Ms Marie Miller, president of the ladies auxiliary to the Grimshaw/Berwyn and district community health centre, addressed to the Minister of Health and Wellness. Ms Miller is expressing deep concern about the future of their hospital in view of the proposed budget cuts being made to the Peace health region.

The second tabling, Mr. Speaker, is a letter from Mrs. Marlene McCann, chair of the joint board, Coaldale United Church. This letter is addressed to the Chinook regional health authority expressing her congregation's serious concerns with the reduction of health services in Coaldale and the transporting of patients to other communities that this might cause.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. MASON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings today. The first is a letter from the Ital-Canadian Seniors of Edmonton. These seniors are very disappointed with the government decision to cancel the Edmonton Community Lottery Board funding.

The second tabling is a letter from Mrs. Audrey Marie Borden addressed to me. Mrs. Borden is a client of Alberta Easter Seals and is concerned with the hardships that disabled people like her are facing due to the government's elimination of community lottery boards.

THE SPEAKER: Additional members?

Hon. members, might we revert briefly to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

head: **Introduction of Guests**

(reversion)

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

MR. DUNFORD: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a couple of young women that are in the Legislature today performing job shadowing on this particular minister, and I'd like to introduce them to you and through you to the Assembly. We have Jolene Moscaluk and Andrea Matias. If they would rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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, it's my pleasure to move that written questions 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 be dealt with today. It was already noted earlier that there are no motions for returns to come forward.

[Motion carried]

Health Care Premium Accounts

Q5. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. As of April 1, 2002, what is the total number of employer health care premium accounts and the total number of individual/family health care premium accounts, and of the individual/family accounts what percentage are seniors' accounts?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to respond on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness and indicate to the member requesting this response and to all members that we will be accepting Written Question 5.

THE SPEAKER: The hon. member to close the debate.

DR. PANNU: I want to thank the minister for his response, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 5 carried]

Health Care Premium Accounts

Q6. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. For each of the fiscal years 1999-00, 2000-01, and 2001-02 how many health care premium accounts were in arrears by one day or more, by three months or more, and by one year or more, what is the total amount of those arrears in each of these three fiscal years, and what percentage were employer accounts, individual/family accounts, and seniors' accounts?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness I'm pleased to advise all members that the government will be accepting Written Question 6 under the hon. member's name.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again rise to express my appreciation for the government's acceptance of Question 6.

Thank you.

[Written Question 6 carried]

Students Finance Board

Q7. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. Upon completion of studies what was the average debt load of postsecondary students who had received assistance from the Students Finance Board in the fiscal years 1990-1991, 1995-1996, and 2000-2001?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Minister of Learning.

DR. OBERG: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In keeping with this government's spirit of openness and accountability, we'd be more than happy to accept this question.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm really delighted to hear from the Minister of Learning that he's open to answering such questions. I appreciate the fact that he accepts this question without reservations.

Thank you.

[Written Question 7 carried]

Human Rights Complaints

Q8. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. What was the average waiting period from the filing of a complaint with the Human Rights Commission to conciliation in the fiscal years 1990-1991, 1995-1996, and 2000-2001, and what was the average waiting period from conciliation to investigation of a human rights complaint in these same fiscal years?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, this is a very well-intentioned question, and quite frankly it's one which I've spoken with the member about and we're going to accept with some amendments. I understand that those amendments have been circulated to all members present, and in fact I did have a bit of a discussion with the hon. member. I would like for purposes of the record at the appropriate time to explain why the amendments are necessary. In the meantime what I'd like to move is the amendment, if that would be in order.

The amended written question would read as follows:

What was the average waiting period from the date a complaint was accepted by the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission to the date the file was assigned to conciliation in the fiscal years 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002, and what was the average waiting period from the date conciliation was concluded to the date complaints were assigned to investigation in these same fiscal years?

Mr. Speaker, speaking to the amendment, if I might just proceed, I just thought it would be beneficial to share with members of the House what prompts the amendments, just to be clear. First of all, when accepting a question, we need to put it into the proper parlance of what it is that is being sought here. I just say that because since we started a new tracking system called CHRIS, which is patterned after the Canadian human rights information system, some of the wordology has changed ever so slightly. The first part of this amendment deals with striking out, for example, "from the filing of a complaint with" and substituting the words "from the date a complaint was accepted by." This amendment aligns the written question with the different stages of complaint handling within the Alberta Human Rights Commission such that potential complaints, when they are submitted to the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission for review and assessment, undergo a bit of a testing, if you will, because not all complaints, when they are first brought to the attention of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, are necessarily accepted by the officers who work there.

Of course, the logical question is: well, why not? Part of the

answer, Mr. Speaker, is because some of those complaints that are referred to the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission may fall outside the commission's mandate or jurisdiction, that is quite common, or perhaps the complaint, at the time it was made, was not made within a certain time period that may or may not be applicable in that particular case. So once staff members do speak with or review with a potential complainant the nature of that particular complaint, then they determine whether or not it is accepted, and then the process starts from there.

Adding the words "and Citizenship" before the word "Commission" simply clarifies the exact body.

By striking out the words "to conciliation" and substituting "to the date the file was assigned to conciliation" is one other point I'll comment on briefly. This amendment aligns the written question again with the different stages of the complaint-handling process. A complaint that is accepted by the commission may not be immediately assigned to conciliation. The amount of time that it sometimes takes for the conciliation process itself will of course vary among the different files, and it's also dependent on the parties and the progress they're able to make amongst themselves.

3:00

The second last change, Mr. Speaker, deals with the fiscal years that were requested versus the years being advanced. I should say that the information that has in fact been requested is simply not available in the form that you would like for the years prior to 1999-2000 because, to be very clear, data from previous years was not converted into the commission's new case management system since it came into force in 1999-2000. That's the CHRIS system. Although the commission did have a case management system prior to CHRIS, it did not provide the type of information in the form and manner in which the member was originally asking. So even if performance indicators such as were requested were available for earlier years, it just wouldn't be comparable to the 2001-2002 year, for example, for which we have the most current information.

The complaint resolution process, Mr. Speaker, has undergone some major changes and some very good improvements since that time. For example, the term "conciliation" and the term "investigation" are now separate processes. They used to be sort of wound together, but they were not separate processes back in 1990-91, which I think is the first date the hon. member was inquiring about. Today they are separated, and they're much more easily identifiable and distinguishable for it.

The final point, Mr. Speaker, is the request in my amendment to strike out "from conciliation to investigation" and substitute "from the date conciliation was concluded to the date complaints were assigned to investigation." Again, this amendment would align the written question with the stages of the complaint-handling process, because if conciliation is not successful or in some cases even if it's declined by either of the parties in question, then the complaint may be assigned to investigation. So there may be a waiting period between the completion of the conciliation stage and the assignment of the complaint to the investigation stage by a human rights officer, and that primarily is due to a very large volume of complaints that the commission might receive in a given period of time for processing.

Those are the reasons, for the record, Mr. Speaker, with respect to why the amendment is posed in the way it is. I want to just conclude by saying that I've always tried to make as much information available on all the questions. On behalf of the ministry I that represent, I think we can say that we've always tried to be very forthright and very forthcoming with responses to these questions, particularly when we're dealing with as sensitive an area as human rights.

So, hon. member, I'm doing the best I can to provide the information, and I hope that's acceptable to you, as we discussed last week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: On the amendment. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I want to thank the minister for the detailed explanation that he's given for the amendments that he's proposing but in addition for the personal consultation that he engaged in with me prior to today. So thank you, hon. minister, for both of those acts of kindness.

Some of the amendments that the minister is proposing are most reasonable. They make sense. For example, amendment (b), adding "and Citizenship" before "Commission": that's the official title of the commission. So that's fine. Some of the others are clarificatory, and in that sense they're helpful.

I have concern, however, with the problem that the new tracking system has caused with respect to your ability to address my question going back to '90-91, and I want to explain to you why I sought the information at five-year intervals, from '90-91 to I think '95-96, and then 2000-2001. It was to give us some sort of measure of the changes in response time, if there are any, from the initiation of the complaint to the conclusion of the complaint, and I'm sure you would be as much interested in finding out whether or not that time period has gone up or shrunk.

The question was initiated or instigated in the first instance because I had received some complaints in my constituency office from a few of my constituents who complained about the fact that they didn't really know, since there is no regulated or legislated period within which the commission must respond and conclude the investigation, the whole process. They were very frustrated in the fact that they didn't know how much time it takes typically for complaints to be heard so that they could compare their own waiting period with that and see whether or not that's reasonable. Given that, that was the reason for the request going back to '91.

Just because the data from the period prior to '99 cannot be easily converted to the new tracking system that you use in my view is not a good enough reason not to try and put that kind of information up front, make it public so that those judgments can be made by Albertans who are concerned about the way the commission works, especially because the commission's resources have remained frozen over the last 10 years and in fact have slightly declined over the last three. That's why people wonder whether or not the ability of the commission to address their concerns and complaints in a reasonable time is being eroded by the freezing of the resources of the commission, thereby impairing the ability of the commission to do precisely what Albertans expect this government to do, which is to make sure that human rights violations or complaints related to those are addressed fairly and accurately and in a reasonable time. So I'm disappointed, and I find it difficult to support (d), number 4 in your proposed amendments, Mr. Minister.

And the last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the last part, which says: by striking out "from conciliation to investigation" and substituting "from the date conciliation was concluded to the date complaints were assigned to investigation." When the minister spoke to me last week about this matter, I wasn't able to point out to him why it is that I find it difficult to accept this part of the amendment, but I've thought it over, and at least for those cases that move from initial probing to the acceptance of the request, for those I think we need the data going all the way back from the day the initial complaint was received through the date of acceptance and from that point on forward to the conclusion of the matter, whenever

that ends, whether it ends at conciliation or whether it ends at investigation later on. I don't know why it would be difficult for the minister to provide the information on those cases which ultimately get accepted, to go all the way back to the date from which the complaint was first received to the day the complaint was finally disposed of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Recognition of the hon. Deputy Government House Leader at this time would conclude the debate on this amendment. The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't wish to prevent others from speaking at this stage, but maybe they'll speak at the next stage. I thought it would be important just to shed a little bit more light on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona's points and specifically some of the questions that he raised. I want to be perhaps clearer than maybe I was. I thought I had been, but maybe I wasn't as clear as I had hoped to be.

The information that is being requested that goes back to the 1990-91 period theoretically in a perfect world could be found and brought forward, but, hon. member, honestly, the amount of time it would take to go back and reconvert that information that you are requesting, the length of time that it would take to do that – the cost, the time, and the number of staff people that we have there – would simply be, in my view at least, an unbearable length of time. Just because the two systems – the one we use today and have been for the past three years is now more of a nationally based approach. When I compare that with the business of getting on with the complaints that are before the commission and respecting its independence and letting it do its own thing and so on, simply suggests that we'll give you what we can that can be done in a reasonable period of time. I think that when you see the information that might come forward, the point that you are trying to address will show up, and that is: what is the government's record, if you like, in terms of how quickly some of these cases can be dealt with?

3:10

With respect, then, to the specific point about the response times having perhaps what you might call bookends, Mr. Speaker – in other words, from the date something is received – can we put in stone a certain date by which it must be resolved? I wish, I truly wish that were possible, but the types of cases that come forward – and while I don't ask for this information, I do have people writing to me about their particular cases, so I am familiar in that vicarious way with some of the cases that might be coming in from time to time. Having looked at all of that, I can tell you with some great assurance that some of the cases are indeed very complex. I don't know where one would begin to say justice had been served if you put a time limit within which it must be reviewed and done.

My experience – and I've been through this as a private member, and I'm sure you have as well – is that you want to be thorough about it. Obviously, you want to be expeditious and expedient, but you want to be so thorough about it. I fear that we would be perhaps risk being counterproductive if we put too firm a time line on it. Nonetheless, the point is made and accepted by the hon. member asking it that we do need to be more vigilant about the time frames taken here, and I think that's really what is sort of at the heart. So I will undertake, when this information comes out, to not only share it with you but to speak with you again about it and see what we can do to address those areas in need.

The other issue, Mr. Speaker, is with respect to the point about the different methods used to arrive at some form of resolution. Perhaps

it should be stressed that the first attempt to resolve a complaint, as I understand it, is the conciliation approach. That is the first thing that happens. This is voluntary. It's a nonadversarial approach to resolving these disputes. It involves having a neutral person or a conciliator, which, as most members should know, helps both the complainant and the respondent to identify the issues, to discuss the factors surrounding the issues, and to generate possible solutions. I should say that the objective of conciliation is simply to reach a settlement which is acceptable, totally acceptable or for the most part acceptable to both parties without having to go through the other stage, which would be investigation. Nonetheless, investigation is another method of resolving.

Just very briefly for the record the investigation stage is an impartial gathering, an impartial collection, an examining of the facts that surround the points raised by the complainant and within the complaint itself. The objective of investigation is to try and determine whether or not the complaint has merit. If the complaint does have merit, then obviously a different route may be taken. An investigation that is conducted if conciliation is inappropriate, unsuccessful, or declined by either party could well be the outcome. If the hon. member likes, I could provide you a little bit more in writing to augment that, or we could chat about it as we did before.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I do want to conclude just by saying that human rights are very fundamental. They're extremely important to all of us, and we're doing everything that we can to ensure that those rights are not only protected but that when those complaints about potential human rights violations are received, they are dealt with as expeditiously as possible.

In my final comments I just want to say that I also respect the independence of the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission. They're doing I think a very good job in addressing this most fundamental and most important area of all. So I hope that that gives a little bit more information with respect to why we are hoping to proceed with this amendment and why I hope it will carry some favour in the end with all members of the House.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: All parliamentarians in the House will have noted that the last series of comments from the hon. Deputy Government House Leader were entirely out of order as they violated Standing Order 25(2) whereby "no reply is allowed the mover of an amendment." There was such great synergy here this afternoon in the House that we proceeded with it, but we will not consider this to be a precedent for the future.

So we currently have before the Assembly an amendment to Written Question 8 as moved by the hon. Minister of Community Development.

[Motion on amendment carried]

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

DR. PANNU: Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the minister for the undertaking that he has given to me. We will work together to resolve some of the concerns that I have, and I hope I won't have to bring further questions to the House in written form on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Written Question 8 as amended carried]

Health Care Premiums

Q9. Dr. Pannu moved that the following question be accepted. Of the moneys the government received from health care

premiums for the fiscal years 1999-2000, 2000-2001, and 2001-2002, what amount was remitted by employers, and of that amount how much was paid by employers on behalf of employees?

THE SPEAKER: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

MR. ZWOZDESKY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure on behalf of the hon. Minister of Health and Wellness to indicate to the House that both he and the government will be accepting Written Question 9 as requested.

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

DR. PANNU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister of Health and Wellness and the Deputy Government House Leader for this good news, particularly the Deputy Government House Leader for being the bearer of the good news.

Thank you.

[Written Question 9 carried]

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

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

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with pleasure and some relief, I'll admit, that I rise today to move and begin debate on Bill 206 as it is read a third and final time.

I would like to start by thanking all the members of the Assembly for their thoughtful contributions to the debates that have taken place about the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002. There have been a great deal of valuable ideas that have come forth from both sides of the House as we have discussed this legislation, and I am pleased that all members of this Assembly have taken such an interest in the idea.

I think that the high level of interest has been generated out of the necessity to find sustainable solutions for Alberta fisheries. For many years now Albertans, aquaculturists, commercial fishermen, and anglers have expressed their unending frustration with an unchecked predator that has hindered the stability and growth of Alberta fishing. As I have said before, this legislation will help promote and support growth in Alberta's fishing industry in conjunction with responsible fishing. It is one piece of the puzzle that we hope can align with other initiatives to enhance and help Alberta fisheries become more sustainable.

As members of this Assembly we are all aware that Bill 206 deals primarily with pest control. As we have discussed repeatedly, the double-crested cormorant has been identified as a major pest in my constituency. Preyed upon by rats and snakes, the cormorant has no natural predators in northern regions of our province. The absence of a natural check and balance for this species has allowed it to flourish at an incredible rate. The overwhelming numbers of birds are helping deplete our fish stocks to dangerously low levels.

3:20

Stop for a moment to consider that we have been stocking the lakes and streams around the province for decades in order to combat low fish stocks and instill stability. With each attempt to

encourage fish population growth, there has been a marked and corresponding increase in activity of cormorants. Mr. Speaker, this leads me to believe that the stocking strategy that has been used has unintentionally provided cormorants with an easy food supply. I think that this legislation is an excellent complement to those worthwhile stocking strategies while stopping its negative consequences.

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, in a four-lake area in my constituency last year there were approximately 46,000-plus cormorants, and it is estimated that they consume about 6 million kilograms of fish each year, realizing that all are not edible, game, or sport. This figure far surpasses the fish limit of 465,000 kilograms placed on commercial fishermen over a 25-lake area in the zone; in fact, 12 times the commercial limit.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many times?

MR. DANYLUK: Twelve times.

Mr. Speaker, I think that we can all see that figures like these clearly show that there is a problem, and we need to address it. In the same manner that Alberta farmers have the ability to control pests that prevent them from achieving maximum efficiencies in their agricultural endeavours, Alberta's aquaculturists will be able to practise the same manner of control over pests that affect them. Through this legislation I think we can recognize the importance of the Alberta fishing industry.

Pests come in all sorts, Mr. Speaker, whether they are mosquitos in the park, gophers in the field, or coyotes in the pasture. We have come to accept that pests like the ones I have just mentioned need to be controlled. The cormorant is another pest just like them, and it is essential to the stability of Alberta fisheries that we start to implement measures of control over the cormorant.

Alberta is not the first jurisdiction to acknowledge these foul fowl as a problem. U.S. Fish and Wildlife has begun searching for options to deal with the cormorant problem south of the border. The affected area stretches from Texas to New York and over to Oregon and into Canada. It is definitely not localized. The birds are a real problem, Mr. Speaker, and I am thankful that there is enough support for us to begin dealing with them here.

This legislation has not been brought forward on a whim. This legislation has been drafted and debated because of a problem that is the most prevalent in northern Alberta constituencies in this province. My constituency is especially troubled, and that was my initial motivation for bringing Bill 206 forward. I have now been educated to realize that we are not isolated.

I would like to ask the members of this Assembly to join me in support of the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act. Your support is essential to the sustainability of Alberta fisheries.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS CARLSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to address Bill 206 at third reading. I had an opportunity to speak to it earlier when it was introduced in second reading and subsequently an opportunity to talk to a number of organizations and people since the time of its introduction. What I have discovered is more people and more organizations who don't like this bill than those that we had first listed when we debated this in second reading. To the credit of the member who introduced this bill, I know that he has done some follow-up with some of those organizations, so I was a little

surprised with his opening comments, that as part of this educating process he didn't refer to the concerns that they had shared with him. Perhaps he should have addressed those concerns as he wrapped up his comments on this bill. So that's too bad. Perhaps someone else in that caucus will bring those concerns forward.

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul is correct when he says that there is a problem with fish stocks in this province, and I have been talking about that problem since 1993 in this Legislature. [interjections] Well, it's too bad – I know that the Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar likes to just barge into debate without standing and taking his place – but this isn't the right thing to do, to bring in this kind of a bill.

This isn't actually solving the problem. This is addressing a symptom, not the actual problem. We have talked for years about what the basic underlying problems are surrounding fish stocks, and I commiserate with the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul, particularly for his commercial fishing people in the region who rely on fish stocks for their livelihood. What we have here are classic problems, most of them stemming from the government's lack of action on addressing what has been a growing problem here in this province.

We see problems that have contributed to this fish issue of unlimited harvests. We've seen supplies that have been decimated. A lot of it is a problem with staffing in the department. There hasn't been consistency or co-ordination. The department's been renamed, reorganized, economized, downsized, privatized. Knowing what the responsibilities are and having the adequate staff to follow through and monitor have been a particular problem with this department. We haven't seen any continuity even in the restocking that they've done.

In the time that I have on this particular bill I would like to address some of the concerns that were brought forward by the Alberta Wilderness Association. I'm hoping that the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul also got a copy of their release. He didn't refer to it in his comments, but then he didn't refer to any of the conversations that he's had with the people who are opposing this bill. The Alberta Wilderness Association released a press release on May 1 with Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, as the subject. The title of their press release is "Bill 206 is a Red Herring," of course quite an appropriate name for this particular bill. What they talk about here is that this private member's bill actually creates the impression that the government itself is doing something on this legislation. Now, I know that private members don't represent government position officially, but we often see private members' legislation introduced in this Assembly that subsequently is at least a trial balloon for government policy that comes down the road, or sometimes it is used as kind of a band-aid solution to address a bigger problem.

Their concern here is that this private member's bill "gives the appearance that the government is doing something to protect our fisheries" and that it "treats the symptoms not the causes." I completely agree with that statement, Mr. Speaker. I believe that that is what's happening here. They talk about this bill allowing "the Minister to order any regulated measure to deal with any animal or bird that is deemed a threat to fish or fish habitat." This bill is a problem from more than just the cormorant's position. It

indiscriminately covers native and non-native species as well as natural habitat and fish farms. The bill is aimed at controlling increasing populations of double-crested cormorants and their predation on fish farms and lakes.

You would think that if that was the only species that they were specifically identifying and going after, it might not be quite as big a problem, aside from the fact that this is more of a feel-good measure than actually addressing the systemic problems here. What

Dr. Richard Thomas, who is the AWA spokesperson on this particular issue, says is that

targeting the cormorant is a real red herring . . . Studies done on Lake Winnipeg, and Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division's own data conclusively demonstrate that increased numbers of cormorants are actually a symptom and not the cause. The actual cause is human overexploitation of the province's fisheries.

3:30

He goes on to say that the ecological process being demonstrated is that "over fishing removes large predatory fish such as walleye and pike." We know that's been an ongoing problem. We know that that's been the subject of numerous studies by Alberta fish and wildlife. We know that that's part of the reason why now we're starting to see limits going into lakes and commercial fishing being stopped. One of the other processes being demonstrated here is that "baitfish populations, upon which the cormorants primarily feed, are 'released' from predation and grow in numbers rapidly," and "cormorant populations expand in response to the greater availability of food."

In essence what they're saying is that the government's poor planning and inability to properly manage the fish stocks is the cause of the increase in the cormorant population. So now you're going to penalize a species and other species that haven't been causing problems, potentially, because the government hasn't been able to properly manage fish stocks, and that is the wrong answer to this particular issue. Dr. Richard Thomas goes on to state that he wonders if the member who introduced the bill "has stopped to consider that fishermen and industrial development regularly affect fish and their habitat." Sorry. That's not attributed to Richard Thomas; that's Jillian Tamblyn, the AWA conservation specialist.

"AWA recognizes the need to conserve and restore Alberta's fisheries," they state in their press release. "Better management of fishing pressure, native fish stocks and habitat protection should be the core of any new legislation," says Tamblyn. "Fish farms and ponds are not natural systems and need to be looked at separately," she says. And that's very true. We now start to see some preliminary measures occurring within the responsible department on this issue, but it's closing the barn door a little late, Mr. Speaker.

We're in a situation now where we've seen the only legislation that the government talks about bringing in are regulations that will be reducing the number of commercial fishermen in this province, and then because they're forced into a situation where these people are going out of business, the government is then going to pay them to get out of the business of fishing. So because of mismanagement over a series of years and one particular industry we see the government having to bail out business again. Totally irresponsible, lack of foresight, and too bad it had to happen in this province. It didn't have to go there at all, Mr. Speaker, had we started to address these issues much sooner than what actually occurred. I don't think the government has the answers now in terms of how to repopulate fish stocks in the province.

I talked to a number of people on the weekend who were very surprised that this would be the kind of legislation that would go through here in the Assembly. I would urge the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to work closely with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development in pushing him to ensure that we have a management and restoration plan in place as soon as possible for restoring fish stocks in this province, because it is certainly a very key issue. Many people make their living from fish in this province from a commercial perspective, from the commercial fisheries being able to keep some prices down in the next level of industry, which is primarily restaurants and resale. Also, fishing provides a great deal of tourism dollars to this province and recreational opportunities for people who live within the province.

If we lose this particular industry, Mr. Speaker, we are facing great economic losses, not to mention the kinds of problems that will occur in the food chain and ecological cycle of this province. So I urge people not to support this bill at this time.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to participate this afternoon in the debate on Bill 206, the Fisheries (Alberta) Amendment Act, 2002. I have listened to various speeches in this Assembly and have certainly read in the newspapers the accounts that some hon. members of this Assembly have had with the double-crested cormorant. If you look at a book on the birds of Alberta, Sangudo would be just on the extreme western section of its range. It certainly, from what I can read, has been a very destructive resident of Sangudo, and the range of this bird pretty well goes north of Slave Lake right to the national park at Wood Buffalo. Now, it will reside in our province from April through October. There are quite a few claims made about its consumption of fish, but I believe that habitat and species management certainly goes beyond giving permission to destroy birds on Crown land.

I've been looking at the information that's available on this bird, and certainly they do have anywhere between, Mr. Speaker, two to four eggs in the nest. I don't know what proposals have been made or whether it's been a consideration that there be just complete nests destroyed or whether there be eggs removed from the nests. I don't know what is the answer, but I'm not convinced that we have taken all the measures that are necessary. The cormorant populations are a concern, as I understand it, across Canada. In the United States the cormorant can be easily seen on the Seal Rocks near San Francisco at Cliff House or even on the coast of Maine. They're almost on every buoy and channel stake in the harbours in Florida. But to think that they are the reason for the decline in our fish stocks I think may be overstated.

Now, I don't know what sort of research has gone into the drafting of this legislation, whether there is scientific background to this. Certainly the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul quoted the tonnes of fish that have been consumed by these birds, but there are other factors, I believe, in the decline of our fish stocks. We look at the increase in forestry. We look at oil and gas development. We look at irrigation projects. They would certainly all threaten in some way fish habitat.

I think we should get more information before we pass this bill on just exactly how the cormorant is impacting fish stocks. To order the destruction of an animal or animals based on hunches or hearsay I don't think is sufficient. I would question this government in how many resources have been utilized to determine the status of fish stocks across the entire province and how much of this science-based research has been done to determine why stocks are at the current levels. Is it simply the diet of the cormorant, or is it a series of factors?

3:40

Now, we look at question period a little earlier in this session, Mr. Speaker. There were certainly questions directed to the government on their plans to buy back fishing licences, and this has to show that perhaps there is some cause for concern there for our declining stocks. I think we should be addressing these issues before we look at killing the cormorant. I mean, it seems quite odd that we would resort to this tactic.

The cormorant has large colonies as I understand it. My research

indicates that there could be up to 3,000 pairs. This bird certainly has family values, and I thought this was something that was relished and cherished by this government. The males have elaborate courtship dances, including dances in the water where he presents the female with material to build a nest. The male will also dance to mark out a nesting site for the couple. Now, most of these nesting sites, as I understand it, are at ground elevation, so if one wanted to remove one or two eggs from those nests, perhaps it would be easily done. I don't know how aggressively they defend their nests.

AN HON. MEMBER: Very.

MR. MacDONALD: They are very aggressive in defence of their nests.

Now, there is, as I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, a clutch between two and four and sometimes maybe more in that nest, but both parents take part in the incubation as well as care for the young. The young are covered in black down and certainly have aggressive appetites, eating food provided of course by the parents, and the young are fed about six times a day. Once they are about a month old, certainly with our climate here and the need to I guess fly south in October, development progresses quite quickly. The birds begin to fly about a month and a half after they are born, and they divide up into small groups. They feed during the day by swimming and diving for fish, and it's interesting that they swim and dive for fish so aggressively in Alberta, but in other areas where they're observed, they don't swim or fly too far from land. So they seem to be living differently, shall I say, around Cold Lake. They have problems where they have to dry their wing feathers, and for that reason biologists indicate that they don't normally travel great distances over water. Perhaps another hon. member of this Assembly can explain to me if they have different behaviours here, or is that just the narrative from fish and wildlife biologists?

Now, it's interesting, as I said, that the nests can sometimes be found in trees but are more commonly found along the ground in crowded colonial sites. This, at some time after there was research done, would perhaps be a suitable time to remove one or two eggs from the nest, but to shoot these birds I think is wrong, and I will not support this bill at this time.

Thank you.

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

DR. MASSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to make some comments about Bill 206. I think that if we first of all look at the background of the problem, there's really been little attention given to the cormorant numbers and very little attention given to the problem itself. There is, you know, the material that's been presented to us during debate. There's been little scientific knowledge brought to bear on the issue. Certainly there have been none of the kind of long-term studies that one might expect given the kinds of action that the bill proposes in terms of a particular species.

The history of the cormorant is that they were low in numbers when the sport fish populations of northern pike and walleye were healthy. So as long as those two species were plentiful, the numbers were always low, and populations only increased after northern pike and walleye stocks collapsed. The increased cormorant numbers are speculated, at least, to be more a reaction to the collapsed pike and walleye populations than the cause of the declines. Better management I guess is what the bill demands, better management of our fishery resources, and that in the long run is probably the best solution in terms of keeping the cormorant population in balance.

So I think there are a couple of issues. The fact that there hasn't been the kind of study that such a move as proposed in the bill would anticipate and the fact that the attributes given in terms of the increase in cormorants are maybe incorrect I think should lead us to have second thoughts.

One of the problems is that the provincial fisheries managers don't have the kinds of resources they need to conduct the field studies, the long-term studies that would be useful when we're trying to make a decision about supporting or not supporting the bill in front of us. If those managers did have the resources that they required, then there would be early warning signs. We wouldn't be left to find ourselves in the situation that we do today, having to react to what is in fact a crisis. We would have the kind of data that we need to make I think more appropriate long-term decisions. But it seems to be more typical of the province; they continue to move into a reaction kind of mode, particularly with the fisheries.

Since 1995 Alberta has had to put in place recovery plans for the bull trout, Arctic grayling, northern pike, and walleye. There's some indication that similar action is being planned for lake trout and yellow perch. So we seem to be in a position of having to react rather than to be in a position of having information that we use to plan and control and make better long-term decisions. I think most of those interested observers would agree that it's really time that the province got out of this approach to fisheries management – that is, a crisis management mode – and gave the kinds of resources that are needed to the provincial fisheries managers so they can do the job that one might expect of them.

3:50

I guess the message is that we should be doing the science first and that before you take action, you identify what the problems are and you put in place a management plan and you monitor what's happening. There are relatively few preliminary studies in terms of even the cormorant numbers and no studies we can come across that seem to study why the number of cormorants seems to be increasing. Again there isn't a provincial management plan for the cormorant, and that's really what's needed. There has been no real study of the preferred control methods, of what is the best way to control that population. It seems that we end up coming forward with management activities before we've properly studied the problem. Here we are putting in place control measures without really having any kind of information on the repercussions of that approach to the problem.

I think that we've all received a number of e-mails on this, and I have drawn my remarks from some of those e-mails, Mr. Speaker. One of the points that I think has been made is that if nothing else Bill 206 has really been very useful in terms of raising public awareness as to the kinds of fisheries and aquatic resource problems that we have. If for no other reason it's been useful in that public relations aspect.

I think it's also been pointed out to us that there is existing legislation where exactly the kinds of things that are anticipated under Bill 206 could have been done, and that's the federal Fisheries Act and Alberta's Water Act. Those two pieces of legislation allow for what's being done in Bill 206 and, furthermore, could provide many more benefits to Alberta's fishery resources than Bill 206 does. So there is existing legislation there. This action can be taken.

I think the other point that needs to be made, Mr. Speaker, is that we do need a long-term monitoring program for fish populations which includes water quality and water quantity studies and that it's not good enough to lurch from crisis to crisis. I think the government has an obligation to start to put the dollars back into the aquatic resources budgets that would allow them to do the job they are hired

to do and would allow them to begin monitoring and making sure that before laws like Bill 206 come before the Assembly the proper study and background work has been done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul to close debate.

MR. DANYLUK: Mr. Speaker, I do have to answer a couple of questions; I'm sorry. First of all, I would just like to suggest to the members opposite that I have referred in the Committee of the Whole to some of the points that were brought up by a number of organizations. I would also like to suggest that this is not a presentation that was done on a whim. It was one that was science based. There is no doubt some question as to what is science based, because there are numerous groups and numerous organizations that have biologists, and I very much value their input.

I have also concurred with members opposite that my bill addresses a small part of the challenges that face fish populations and the attention and dedication that is needed to enhance fish stocks through the province. I would also like to suggest that the bill will support the positive initiatives that the government has taken. I would also say that no one has the exclusive answers for the fish stock challenges, but this government is doing something about it. I do not want to stand by and be part of the demise and the destruction of fish stocks and the collapse of our lakes. I believe that this bill does enhance fish stocks in Alberta, and it is a small part that I believe I can play.

Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion for third reading carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:56 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

| | | |
|----------|------------|------------|
| Abbott | Herard | Oberg |
| Ady | Horner | Renner |
| Broda | Hutton | Shariff |
| Cao | Jablonski | Smith |
| Cenaiko | Johnson | Snelgrove |
| Coutts | Jonson | Stelmach |
| Danyluk | Lord | Stevens |
| Doerksen | Lougheed | Strang |
| Evans | Lukaszuk | Tannas |
| Forsyth | Lund | Tarchuk |
| Friedel | Masyk | Taylor |
| Fritz | McClelland | VanderBurg |
| Goudreau | McFarland | Vandermeer |
| Haley | Norris | Zwozdesky |

Against the motion:

| | | |
|-----------|--------|---------|
| Carlson | Mason | Nicol |
| MacDonald | Massey | O'Neill |

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Totals: | For – 42 | Against – 6 |
|---------|----------|-------------|

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a third time]

4:10

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 207

Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

REV. ABBOTT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak on Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act. This bill would establish test market conditions for a 10-year period where Alberta farmers could operate within the freedom to sell their product to whomever they choose at any price under any conditions. I stand today in wholehearted support of Bill 207.

In this discussion there is important information that should be made known. The entrenched institution, the Canadian Wheat Board, which from hereon in I will refer to as the CWB, sustains myths and misinformation to guide our beliefs. Mr. Chairman, I am not prepared to accept the board's self-serving trade methods at the expense of our farmers' livelihoods and our grain industry. The farmers of Drayton Valley-Calmar and the farmers of Alberta deserve better.

With my time today I would like to analyze the current monopoly situation and put it in the much-needed perspective of current farming and distribution needs in Alberta. In doing so, I'll explore the benefits of Bill 207.

Mr. Chairman, this bill at its core is about the disruption of a monopoly. The benefits in this case would be widespread for Alberta farmers and eventually the Canadian grain market as a whole. Any situation where a monopoly exists legally or illegally breeds inefficiencies. That is to say that it encourages inefficient production simply by not rewarding innovation and personal cost efficiency. Further, by limiting supply, it certainly infringes on our growth. Economic profits go unrealized. This represents a dead-weight loss felt in the end by the farmers themselves. By untying their hands, these profits would be realized automatically and distributed efficiently.

Mr. Chairman, the monopoly situation can be clearly seen under certain conditions. Let's look at OPEC. The demand for oil is so steady and the product differentiation so limited that above-normal profits can be realized through collusion among parties. This end is undermined when a party either refuses to participate in the first case or turns on the original collusion agreement. We see these textbook monopoly cases mostly in global commodity markets where international law is undefined, and this collusion, generally illegal under fair business tribunals, is allowed to exist.

Here, Mr. Chairman, the CWB ensures complete participation; that is, farmers are forced, legally required to sell their grain exclusively to the CWB. Since 1919 farmers' choice to sell has been wholly dictated. The CWB's argument attempts to emulate the OPEC economic motivations. They say:

The delivery monopoly and the control it gives the CWB over the western Canadian inventory of wheat and barley are essential to carrying out the sales strategy . . . Without the monopoly, the CWB would be selling in direct competition with other sellers of Canadian grain. Such competition among sellers would quickly reduce the market price for a given quality of grain.

Mr. Chairman, this assumes too much. This assumes that the world market demands a homogenous product with a very steep demand curve. This assumes that Canadian downstream industries and consumers take the board's price as law when making their own business decisions. This assumes that innovation and market-affecting cost efficiency at the ground level are needed. This assumes that all competition is negligible with regard to its own pricing decisions, and this assumes that a monopoly seller does not limit effective selling or pricing options.

Mr. Chairman, first, we can agree that wheat products are in high demand. What differentiates this industry from a true monopoly situation is that great diversity exists and the market accepts and desires even more diversity. The argument for a monopoly structure doesn't hold when a product is sufficiently diversified. There is a growing market for variety and quality that is simply not being addressed under the CWB's control.

Secondly, under the CWB structure whatever price they say is the price that goes. Consumers and downstream agents take this price as given, heaven sent if you will, and make all individual decisions based on this given price. With such far-reaching effects from flour producers to transport ships to a family's loaf of bread, let us hope that the given price is indeed the most advantageous price. Mr. Chairman, this is simply impossible for the CWB to achieve. The only way to guarantee efficiency in this sense is to let market forces prevail and let the market itself determine the equilibrium price. So consumers and other downstream agents are paying inflated prices that ultimately skew consumer decisions, and in industry investment and research and development budgets can be affected also.

Thirdly, in this increasingly attractive and competitive global industry there is a distinct need for innovation, new developments, and cost efficiency. Currently under the CWB there can exist no independent reward mechanism. All of the product goes into a pool, and the price they give you is the price you get. So this offers no incentive whatsoever to improve methods or quality and no incentive to find new ways of doing things. In any other industry this restrictive policy would not be accepted.

Fourthly, we clearly do not find ourselves in a pure monopoly situation because the commodity market supports a few large players. In effect, we are operating within oligopoly conditions and pricing under a monopoly structure. So by giving farmers the freedom to sell privately, we will maintain our dominant output position and allow competition on price, variety, and quality.

My fifth and related point, Mr. Chairman, argues that selling limitations are tied directly to these pricing limitations. There are large markets available with increasing demand that simply cannot be fully captured by the CWB working alone. From port arrangements to term contracts to hedging agreements to trade provisions our industry would be better served if the farmers themselves were in control. For instance, a farmer could choose to set up long- or short-term contracts across a variety of markets.

Mr. Chairman, I urge the members of this Assembly to join me in my support of Bill 207. This bill will aid farmers across Alberta and encourage improvements throughout the industry. Over 80 percent of Alberta farmers want the ability to sell their grain to any buyer, which includes the Canadian Wheat Board, in domestic and export markets. Let's give them this chance. Let's get behind our farmers in this very significant and profitable local industry.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

4:20

MR. MASON: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I rise to speak

against Bill 207. I know for many members opposite that's heresy, but it only underlines the fact that this is a religious rather than a political thing. It shows that the members have a religious belief in markets which is not borne out in any scientific way.

This is a bill which is intended to undermine and ultimately destroy the Canadian Wheat Board, and it is part of a government policy of favouring the growth of large-scale corporate farms at the expense of small producers. This bill will be in our view another nail in the coffin of the family farm in western Canada, and there are lots of people from all political walks of life who believe that preserving the family farm is something that is worth doing. I would remind the hon. minister of industry of that.

There are some very simple things that I think need to be identified. If you're selling a product and you're the only one that has the product and there are many, many buyers out there, the market power is with the seller, with you, and you can get any reasonable price for your product, depending on how badly the group of buyers needs it, but if there are multiple vendors of a product, in this case wheat, and only one or two buyers, then the power of course resides with the buyers. If you examine the market, it's the latter model that exists. There are many, many farmers who sell their grain to very few buyers.

The people who talk about the free market are the same people who make the mistake in the energy industry in terms of the production of electricity. Where there are so few producers, it's reversed. There are so few producers of electricity and it costs so much to be involved that in fact no real market can exist. In this case, eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board – and that's what this bill is really all about – will favour agribusiness. It will favour large-scale corporate farms, and it will accelerate the elimination of small and medium-sized farms in western Canada.

It attempts to set up a dual market. Now, it's interesting that the Canadian National Millers Association, which represents the value-added processing industry that this bill is supposed to help, argues that a dual market would create supply uncertainty and discourage value-added processing in Canada. The Canadian National Millers Association supports either an open market altogether or a single desk but not a dual market.

I want to talk a little bit about the myth, Mr. Chairman, that there are an unlimited number of buyers out there, that farmers will have a choice and be able to sell their grain, because in fact that's not the case. There are a relatively limited number of companies that will buy the grain plus some brewers and so on, but there's a relatively small number of potential purchasers of the grain. So to suggest that farmers will have a free market to deal with when they sell their grain is just completely false, and again it speaks to the fact that this is more an article of theology with some of the Conservative members than it is a scientifically proven theory.

I think that another myth that exists is that there would be greater choice, but in fact there are only a few multinational corporations, a handful of brewers and millers, as I said, and these processors themselves are constantly amalgamating and growing larger and fewer. Farmers are then expected to increase their efficiency by expanding their operations, and that doesn't actually increase production. It only reduces the number of farmers by having fewer farmers farming larger sections of land. So the Canadian Wheat Board is therefore not limiting choice. Rather, it's ensuring that farmers are able to put collective pressure on a small number of buyers.

Now, the federal Auditor General's report of February 27, 2002, found that the Canadian Wheat Board has been fairly successful at predicting prices and has increased its accuracy over the last three years. The Auditor General's report also notes that the market is

becoming increasingly complex because of global competitiveness and found that the Canadian Wheat Board's marketing capacity was a major strength.

Another myth that's being spread by proponents of killing the Wheat Board is that farmers will benefit from increased prices. The Canadian Wheat Board plays a key role in procurement and transportation, and without that, the farmer or the purchaser will have to bear those costs.

A myth also associated with the proponents of this bill is that an open market can coexist with the Canadian Wheat Board. Advocates of the dual market would like to take advantage of the risk sharing which is created by pooling while capitalizing on the occasional high prices in the cash market, and that would mean that when prices are high, grain would be marketed privately while the Canadian Wheat Board pool prices lag behind. When prices are falling, the pooling prices would again lag but this time would be above the prices achieved through private marketing. Farmers would therefore prefer to sell to the Canadian Wheat Board at this time. However, the Canadian Wheat Board would therefore be operating in a deficit. When prices are rising, farmers would not sell their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board, and when prices drop, farmers would sell through the CWB, causing the pool to sell larger quantities at lower prices and in a tougher marketing environment.

Mr. Chairman, one of the last things I want to deal with is the proposition by proponents of the bill that getting rid of the Canadian Wheat Board will increase the value-added sector in Alberta. Value is added because the Wheat Board is able to consistently guarantee high-grade grains. Purchasers already benefit from the stable procurement offered by the Canadian Wheat Board. Value added through processing would not be passed on to farmers.

I just want to say in conclusion that there is a whole complex of policies of this government which seem designed to develop a corporate model for agriculture in this province where large-scale, investor-owned operations predominate. It's not just this act, but we see it in any number of other policies of this government. The government is not being clear with Albertans about where it's taking agriculture. They're certainly not being open and honest about that policy direction, because quite frankly many Albertans would not support it if they knew. So we see this act. Instead of just saying that we want the Canadian Wheat Board to be eliminated, it sets up dual marketing, knowing full well that dual marketing is going to undermine and eventually lead to the destruction of the Canadian Wheat Board and therefore the livelihoods of many family farms and farm families.

So, Mr. Chairman, in conclusion I would urge all members to oppose this bill. Thank you.

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

MR. DANYLUK: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to rise today to address Bill 207. I will be supporting this bill because it will benefit my constituency and it will benefit this province.

Section 2(2) of this bill outlines how any deal with the federal government and the Canadian Wheat Board would have to include the right of Alberta farmers to sell their wheat or barley to either the Canadian Wheat Board or to any buyer of their choosing. This is a very important section and in essence the heart of this bill.

Mr. Chairman, I proudly represent a northern constituency, one where people place a great deal of importance on rugged individual freedoms. This is not only the way of the north, but it is also a creed of this province. Bill 207 speaks to this and the individual freedom

of farmers, be they from Athabasca or Drumheller, to control the product they grow and maximize the potential for profit.

4:30

This bill, Mr. Chairman, could have called for disbandment of the Canadian Wheat Board, but it didn't. This bill could have denied choice to farmers much the same as the Canadian Wheat Board has done to our farmers, but it didn't. Instead, Bill 207 calls for the establishment – and I stress “establishment” – of a test market that offers Alberta producers choice. They can continue to market their wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board, or if they feel that they can get a better deal elsewhere, then absolutely they should have the ability to do so.

When allowed choice and the opportunity to control their own destiny, Alberta farmers have always accepted the challenge. In fact, we can see the strength of choice and the freedom in the oat market. I recently was reading about Alberta's oat industry in the spring 2002 edition of *Alberta Food for Thought*. The article interviews Mr. Ray Lottie, oat buyer for General Mills. Mr. Lottie helps to buy oats to make Cheerios, the best-selling cereal in North America. Cheerios is made of whole-grain oats, and virtually every last oat in this cereal is Canadian-grown with a significant portion coming from – you guessed it – Alberta. General Mills has a one-third share of the \$12 billion North American market for ready-to-eat breakfast cereals.

That translates into a huge need for produce, Mr. Chairman, a need that saw General Mills buy roughly 12 percent of the entire Canadian oat crop in 2001. That accounts for around 300,000 acres of Canadian oats. As the magazine points out, “Even though oats from Manitoba and Saskatchewan are closer to the company's Minneapolis-area processing plants, and therefore cheaper to buy,” General Mills still comes to Alberta to purchase oats. The people at General Mills demand quality and specifically look for certain physical and nutritional qualities. Alberta farmers help to provide that quality. Mr. Lottie points out that “a bowl of Cheerios packs a lot of nutrition, and that's due in large part to the quality of the oats. Alberta's a great place to grow oats, and we are pleased to be a major buyer.” High praise indeed, Mr. Chairman, a testament to our producers' ability to produce a high-quality product and capture a share of the market.

I think it is no coincidence that domestic processing of oats has increased 12-fold since it was removed from the CWB in 1989. We need the same ability for our producers to take control of their lives and products when it comes to wheat and barley. Bill 207 will allow us to move in this direction. Bill 207 will also help us capture a greater share of value-added processing. This is an area where western Canada has fallen behind, and for an entrepreneurial province such as ourselves it is an area where we can do much better.

Mr. Chairman, one can only look at the numbers to see how we are falling behind in value-added processing. It is a fact that western Canada produces 95 percent of Canada's wheat but has only about 31 percent of the flour milling capacity. Eastern Canada does the vast majority of wheat processing. It is a fact that when we look at our immediate neighbours to the south, there is two to three times more wheat milled in the northern tier American states compared to Canadian provinces. The volume of durum processed in the northern tier states is also higher than in the prairies. It is a fact that if we were to look at a percentage of grain production that is processed domestically, the ratio has increased from 10.7 percent to 11.9 percent in Canada since 1989. It is also a fact that over the same period of time the same ratio of domestic grain processing has increased in the United States in excess of 60 percent. It is a fact that the U.S. processes more than twice as much malt barley as

Canada, yet they have only about half the barley production relative to Canada.

It is also interesting to note that the domestic crush of canola has increased 125 percent and that canola oil and meal shipments have doubled over the five-year period from '93-94 to '97-98. I don't think I need to remind hon. members that canola is a crop that has somehow miraculously escaped the protection and assistance of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Chairman, the Canadian Wheat Board does not add value for western farmers. It adds costs. In fact, the Canadian Wheat Board's general and administrative expenses have increased by 45 percent over the past five years and have doubled over the last 10 while export values have fallen. It is time that we add competition to the marketing industry to benefit this province and her proud producers.

Mr. Chairman, I would urge all members of the Assembly to support this bill and, as the hon. Premier said in question period last week, get on the bandwagon to convince the federal government that the Canadian Wheat Board should allow dual marketing so that we can add value to our crops and reasonably market them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Redwater.

MR. BRODA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to rise today to speak on the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act, Bill 207. With this opportunity I would like to offer a few points of support for Bill 207. I will show how the CWB's restraints are at the core harmful, and I will highlight some of the major benefits of the proposed bill, 207.

Currently, Mr. Chairman, farmers are obligated to sell their products to the Canadian Wheat Board. Farmers have no other choice. The CWB then has exclusive decision-making control on pricing, selling arrangements, marketing, and quality pooling. When you take these powers away from the farmers, you negatively influence and limit their production decisions all along the line. For instance, our farmers are unable to best choose the desired output or how to best offer quality variations. These decisions can only be made in response to supply conditions. By keeping our farmers operating blindly, the CWB's control inevitably hurts the farmer's position, profit, and prospects.

Our province's wheat and barley industry, Mr. Chairman, is being handled by regulations that are restrictive, harmful, and distinctly anti co-operative. Our farmers produce in a globally competitive market, and specifically the goal of economic efficiency simply cannot be met with state agency control. It's vital at this time to put decision-making and flexibility into the hands of the farmers. Also, it should add the same flexibility to the CWB.

4:40

Mr. Chairman, this bill offers many benefits. First, an Alberta farmer would be operating under free market conditions. Alberta wheat and barley producers would receive market value for their product, which could very well be higher than the CWB's imposed price. The ability to compete and succeed freely in a competitive market is a fundamental principle in Alberta. Indeed, the opportunity for success through our own efforts is a key ingredient of the Alberta advantage. It's distinctly unfair that the hardworking farmers are not afforded standard marketplace freedoms. Certainly they should be rewarded based on their own decisions and their own product, not as set by the CWB rate.

Second, the bill helps Alberta farmers make better production decisions. At the end of the day, Mr. Chairman, a farmer offers up a product to sell. In order to make important decisions, a farmer

must be able to gauge market demand and interact with consumers directly. These decisions include whether to invest in new technology or develop new methods or how much quantity to produce and which varieties or characteristics are demanded. It seems that presently farmers produce for the CWB to satisfy the CWB's limited pool requirements. This is an unacceptable framework which is ultimately harmful to the consumer.

Bill 207 enables the farmer to produce directly for the consumer. Let's suppose that there is new or increased demand for a particular type of wheat. An individual farmer is able to better respond to this increased demand, because under Bill 207 the farmer sells directly to the buyer. This establishes a personal business relationship, making communications and feedback much easier. Bill 207 creates an incentive to cater to buyers that is not present under the CWB's control. Competition ensures that the buyer's needs are best met. The farmer who offers the product closest to that demand wins the business.

Third, this new marketing environment could bring secondary processing investments to Alberta. As the supply market changes to better serve actual demand, new opportunities for processing will become available. For example, suppose there is a demand for a specialty or heavily refined grain. The CWB's limited pool categories cannot satisfy this market. Under Bill 207 a farmer can choose to offer the product perhaps by making a capital investment in new refinery equipment. If not, that opportunity is available to whoever can provide it most efficiently and at the best price. Here we see the possibility of secondary processing investment. This could mean farmers diversify their operations, or it could mean the emergence of value-added industries. Either way, Bill 207 can only improve the position of Alberta farmers and the agricultural industry.

Fourth, Bill 207 provides for market opportunities both in Canada and internationally. Farmers will be able to personally market their products. This will lead to searching out new markets and fighting to capture them. Likewise, there will exist the motivation to retain and expand existing markets. In a competitive environment this process is ongoing. Globally we see an ongoing shift towards the elimination of barriers to trade. Tariffs are being reduced, and transportation is becoming more efficient and accessible. These globalization changes are causing huge markets to open throughout the world. A new opportunity, for example, is South America.

Bill 207 facilitates individual incentives. These global trends will be fully incorporated into the farmers' production and marketing decisions. This will only help to eventually increase sales on international markets. Allowing free competition will not sabotage our goals of capturing market and making profit. It will increase our markets, allowing us to increase market share and allow profits to be fully realized by farmers on an individual level.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, let me note that Bill 207's aim is not to abolish the WCB. The bill proposes a 10-year test marketing allowing the government of Alberta to explore the . . .

AN HON. MEMBER: You're on the wrong bill.

MR. BRODA: Okay. The CWB then, the Canadian Wheat Board. My apologies if I've been making that mistake. It's almost similar, you know.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, if the CWB is concerned with farmer profit, industry innovation, growth, and quality assurance, then the bill allows them to work alongside independent farmers to contribute in a free market atmosphere.

In conclusion, I am glad that my colleague the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has brought forward this bill. It is well considered, relevant, and overdue. I suspect, Mr. Chairman, that

other provinces will be drawn to our decision, and I suspect that this decision will gain speed. This bill gives our farmers the freedom and opportunity they need to best compete in a competitive environment. It is important for farmers and their families, our regions' farming industry, and the province as a whole. I recommend that all members support Bill 207.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: Hon. members, before I recognize the next speaker, I just wish to draw your attention to *Beauchesne* 458, which states: "Members are not to cross between the Chair and a Member."

The hon. Member for Lloydminster-Vermilion.

MR. SNELGROVE: I think that's an excellent procedure.

Well, Mr. Chairman and colleagues, it's truly a pleasure to stand here today and give you my take a little bit on the Wheat Board issue.

AN HON. MEMBER: Sing us a song.

MR. SNELGROVE: I'll testify.

The thing I'd like to put forward to some of the opposition concerns – one is that somehow this bill may damage the Canadian family farm. Well, in fact since 1963, when we had 221,000 permit holders, we're now down to 100,000 completely under the control of the Canadian Wheat Board. If that's a friend of the family farm, I'd like to see an enemy. There's no question that when you have no one to compete with to buy your product, then you're at their mercy. However, it was also said, you know: there's just no one else out there to buy the wheat. Well, duh. They won't let them buy the wheat. From the minute you seed your crop, it's not yours. It's unfortunate that in this country we feel that it's all right for Ontario and Quebec to have a choice to market, but western Canada can't. That by itself should be enough to trip the lights that say that there's something wrong in Canada when half of the country doesn't have a choice that the other half does.

It goes back to the discussion the federal government had about the Wheat Board. It was unfortunate at the time how boring it was to have to watch the TV, but at the time, Mr. Chairman, 22 Reform members that had been involved in farming all their lives were debating 14 lawyers from Ontario about the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. You know they're going to lose that argument, but it's unfortunate those decisions are made down there.

I just want to go on a little bit about an example on my farm. We came out as a government a few years ago with a program to help the farmers with \$10.29 an acre, and that was supposed to help. The cost to our farm to sell our malt barley to the plant at Alix worked out to \$60 an acre. Picked up by trucks in our yard and dumped at Alix, never got near an elevator, never got near a rail line, never got near a Wheat Board office, but the cost to our farm was \$60 an acre. Now, that's just a little bit excessive, but there's no one else who can buy it.

I understand the position that when you're selling grain, if you're the only one that's selling it, if you've got all the marbles in the marble game, you win. That's fine for an export market. That would work if in reality we were the only ones with wheat to sell, but that's not true. The biggest problem we have is that we see how connected we are to the world markets, and the American farm bill is a concern of ours. The only way around that is to have value-added industry in our province and our country, because we cannot stop what they're going to do. It's that simple. The European countries and the Americans have no interest in our little game here.

They don't care if we play or not. So to worry about what they do at this point seems a little bit irrelevant.

The thing I'd like to point out too that I think we've lost out on – so much of it is Alberta's history, and it's been an advantage that we don't promote; this isn't really a topic that comes up too much – is the simple fact that we are the only province that's rat free. If you've ever had the occasion to go to the ports on the coast and watch the trains unload your grain, which comes – in Alberta, for example, if you show up with a load of grain and there's any trace of deer waste in it, it's condemned. The entire load goes to feed. Yet all across Canada we can have rats run through all of our food with no questions asked. As long as we keep it under the acceptable amount, then we can make flour and sell it.

4:50

Well, in Alberta the acceptable amount of rat manure in our wheat would be zero. Now, to market our flour around the world to a lot of countries with wealth and with the demand and say, "This is the only flour in the world that's rat free" – and that is a simple fact – we have never tried to promote that, but we can't, because the Wheat Board owns our wheat the minute we plant it. We've had a tremendous job done in Alberta by the Alberta beef association and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association selling the best quality product around the world, and it works. We have the best product. We would also have and do have the best wheat, along with Saskatchewan, our neighbours. They have rats. You put yourself in the spot of most housewives when you go to the grocery store and there is a bag of flour that is completely rat manure free. It's just another marketing tool we've never tried. In fact, we mix all of this together and ship it off. As a matter of fact, when the wheat is full, we dump more screenings back in it to get the tonnage, and then we add water to get the weight. There's no quality sold around the country with our wheat to suggest that we do have good wheat till it gets to the coast, it's true, but after that it's not.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to say this: there's a lot to it. The Wheat Board may have served us back in the '40s and '50s, but its time has come and gone. The train has left. Let's get on with it. Let's give people the right to sell what's theirs and make them make the choice.

Thank you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

DR. NICOL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just rise today to express a few comments on this bill. One of the things that comes out as we go through and look at the idea that we have to have choice and we want to have choice in marketing our products – I don't think that in effect creates a lot of discussion for very many people when you start raising that issue, and Alberta farmers recognized that in their plebiscite. I guess the issue that comes up in the context of the bill that I've tried to figure out over the last month or so when I've been spending time and thinking about this is: how do we go about actually implementing it in the context of a test market? We've got a lot of the services that are associated with marketing grains in Canada that are undertaken by the Canadian Wheat Board. In the U.S. and in Europe these are done by different agencies, not the marketers. So in effect some of the margin differential that we experience here in Canada is a reflection of that different service provided within the context of that market. In other words, some countries are using tax dollars as a subsidy for what we're paying through the Canadian Wheat Board margin.

I think the real issue that we have to start looking at is the process that we go through here. I think it must have been about '95 or so

that we had a plebiscite in Alberta about grain marketing, both for the barley growers and the wheat growers. We ended up thinking about how we deal with the issues of giving them choice. I read through a lot of the material that was in *Hansard* and listened to a lot of the discussion today that hasn't got into *Hansard* yet, and we keep talking about monopolies. Well, in the context of the Canadian Wheat Board the term "monopoly" is irrelevant. What it is is a legislated single marketer. It's not a monopoly, because a monopolist has to have the ability to control price, and the Canadian Wheat Board doesn't. What you've got is that in effect the Wheat Board markets into the international market, into the domestic market, pools the prices, and takes off the margin. So it's really a marketing agent as opposed to somebody who buys, takes the risk, and resells. In effect, it's a single-desk marketing agent which has, you know, a very significant margin when we compare it to a lot of the other grain marketers out there who actually buy, take ownership, and then resell with their own risk involved.

So if we're going to do this, I guess the question that I ask as well is in terms of how we go about implementing it. One of the things that the agricultural products marketing act does is it commits to Alberta farmers the process of market co-operation, depending on how that gets defined. The process under that AG marketing act is that a business plan is put forward by a group, it's promoted across the industry, and it's then voted on by the industry whether or not they as an industry want to enter into that kind of a market strategy. If we look at how these choices are made, here what we're doing is we're basically saying that we're going to change a marketing plan that's under legislation, although it's federal, without that same kind of commitment to the producers of this province where they in effect will have the democratic right to approval of their market choice. I think that's got to be a critical part of this bill. I would hope that if it becomes implementable, what we'll see is a true grassroots approval process put together with the farmers in the province. I would hope that that wouldn't be as broad based, in the context of "Do you want choice?" because in many ways what we've got to do is look at the current structure that's there. The domestic market is very, very corrupted, if you wanted to say, by the relationship between the producers, the Wheat Board, and the buy-back provisions.

You know, I had a couple of the Wheat Board executive and staff come in and try to explain to me how their domestic resale or buy-back provisions were supportive of the industry. But in many ways they're making sure that every producer pays the marketing margin no matter whether they sell through the board or in effect sell down the street through the board, where the costs associated with that marketing margin mostly are associated with the international market. So what we need to do is make sure that one of the things that we deal with in the context of an option – in listening to how both the federal government and the Canadian Wheat Board actually operate, I would guess that section 2(1) under the act is almost an unachievable part of the bill, because it says in there: "enter into an agreement with" the minister or the Canadian Wheat Board. Well, I can't imagine either one of these at the federal level ever agreeing to this.

But if we can in effect look at it from the point of view of how it gets operated, part of this process is that we've got to make sure that the domestic market gets to have more competition in it, a better reflection of the true costs of marketing within the domestic market as opposed to the total market margin that's there, associated with the international market, which includes all of the country intelligence, which includes all the market intelligence, which includes weather, all of these kinds of issues that the Canadian Wheat Board undertakes. We've got to see if there are ways that that can be

worked out as part of trying to provide more opportunity within the domestic market.

Mr. Chairman, I really see that if we look at it from the point of view of where we could make some progress, it would be in the context of this domestic choice that we're talking about. If we start dealing with the international market, then we end up getting much more involved with the federal jurisdiction, interprovincial issues, but if we were to take and deal with it from the perspective of a domestic market for our value added – you know, a lot of the movement of the value-added from Alberta to the east has been associated with the historic grain transportation subsidies, more so than the Wheat Board, but that is now past us. We are in a situation now where western Canada doesn't really have in a sense the local volume to justify value added, so we've got to make our value-added industry an international component, and that's where we have to work.

5:00

One of the things that we've read a lot about in the last 10 days especially – but it's been brewing for two or three months – is this new U.S.S farm bill and how it is really going to have an impact on Canadian grain producers especially. If we look at it from the point of view of how they go about providing support to their industry, in effect a lot of their industry support comes through value-added purchasing, which raises the local price and supports the margin of the value-added producer. So we end up in effect creating a government subsidy direct to the value-added industry to establish in the U.S.

What you end up with, then, is these producers looking at: should we establish in the tier right below Canada, get access to similar but not as good quality grains in the northern U.S., and then have access as well to Canada? That's one of the things that they're looking at when they make these choices, because they do have that federal, quote, farm bill component that subsidizes their production under the activities of the support for value added. So what you end up with, then, is not really having the international choice that we would like to see for individuals to locate their value-added industries, and you know, I had already indicated that I see some real issues with the buyback margin that is charged by the Canadian Wheat Board, but it is, as I said, reflective of those costs.

The other thing that we look at is the issue of how much competition we're really going to have. I've been surprised in the last little while as we saw some of our grain handling groups in effect give up co-operative status and become shareholder corporations, and the producers are losing control of those entities as well. How long before they start to become part of the international food conglomerates and deal with the issues of how to in effect give up some of the control that we had here?

One of the things that we really have to also look at is the whole issue of: is there a way through actions like this by the government, by the producers that we can in effect facilitate greater differentiation of quality to cover the issue that we heard from the previous speaker in terms of, you know, the purity of our grain so that people get the product they're buying? This needs to be brought out.

I guess, Mr. Chairman, that what I'm trying to do is talk a little bit about some of the options that we should be looking at, that we should be pursuing, trying to make sure that our producers do get some choice, some options, even though under this umbrella, if it were to happen that the Canadian Wheat Board was to allow a test market or the minister was to allow a test market in Alberta, that would all be rolled under. We may have to do this on an incremental basis rather than go for the full issue, because what we're going to see is that there will be I think a less friendly reception to this at the federal level.

I guess that as the act moves along, if we can get some kind of an idea of how they would see the actual marketing plan being presented to farmers, to get their input in terms of their choice of whether or not it's right before we go and negotiate with the federal government or the Wheat Board – that would be something that I'd be looking for as well. You know, we've got to make sure that this is the kind of issue that the farmers in the province recognize.

One of the things that came out very plainly after the plebiscite on producer choice was the fact that a lot of individuals felt that they wanted to be able to still use the Wheat Board, but they wanted to give their neighbours a choice if they wanted to. They're going to have to have assurances before a new program is put in place that choice still will exist. I guess what we want to look at is that if you decide to opt out of the Wheat Board as a province or provide choice as a province, if a producer wants to market through the Wheat Board or market through a choice alternative, then what are the options for in-and-out movement? Can they be provided with an opportunity to move back into a choice situation or do they have to stay in the Wheat Board if they choose to stay at the start or the other way around?

One of the things that is imperative for the Wheat Board to operate is a degree of certainty of supply. They're trying to achieve that now with more contract, but they're also going to have to have an option that if a producer takes the choice route, they in effect stay there. Similarly, if they choose the Wheat Board route, will they be required to stay there? So what we need to do is make sure that the movement in and out is fully defined, so we can then deal with it from the perspective of how producers in effect would be able to, you know, make their choice. Would they have to signal at the beginning of the year with a contract? Would they have to basically sign up for a two- or three- or four-year program? A lot of the marketers deal with long-term delivery contracts. These are a bunch of the issues. We need to make sure that producers all have a chance to discuss and to discuss at length before they end up committing to a test market. We need to make sure that producers understand what they're getting into.

I wasn't able to find in some of the information that I looked at on this bill what the implications are of a choice situation. The ability to deal with the market, how we share the costs of marketing that are developed and are in the public domain under the Wheat Board: how do we get those put in place?

So, you know, in the end, Mr. Chairman, I think that before this act moves forward and moves into a position where farmers are going to feel either comfortable with it or totally opposed to it, a lot more information has to be provided to them. I know that I've had a few calls: support this. I've had a number of calls saying: don't support it. Basically, it boils down to: how is it going to be implemented? That's the question that almost everybody is asking, in the sense of: what are the trade-offs? How will they deal with it from the perspective of moving from one market to the other? What would be the relationship between the Alberta producers in the Wheat Board versus the Alberta producers operating under a choice situation?

5:10

So, Mr. Chairman, I think that with those few comments I'll take my seat. I'd really appreciate some clarification on some of those points that I've raised, if it is possible, to see exactly how we would go about implementing it. You know, to say that we're going to create a choice situation sounds good and sounds easy, but in the operational aspects of it it's very complex, very complicated and is going to require some really tough decisions between how the relationship between all producers and the Wheat Board works,

because the Wheat Board provides more than just the single-desk marketing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THE DEPUTY CHAIR: The hon. Member for Peace River.

MR. FRIEDEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak on Bill 207, the Alberta Wheat and Barley Test Market Act. We've heard a number of opinions – most of them I agree with – but I want to add my two bits' worth on why I think this bill is important; namely, to touch on some of the benefits and also to make a comment or two on a few of the skeptical comments that I've heard.

First of all, Mr. Chairman, the core of Bill 207 is all about the idea of choice. We know that free markets have always been important for all of our industries, and Bill 207 would give our farmers a similar choice, and that choice would be whether to participate in the Canadian Wheat Board or to market their product independently. This freedom is enjoyed by the eastern provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and the Wheat Board's monopoly control over prairie grain farmers is not only unfair, but it's a downright insult. This bill simply asks for the same choices that other provinces now enjoy.

Personally, I see the Wheat Board monopoly as nothing more than a central government effort to retain control. We know that 80 percent of Canada's agricultural land is located in the western provinces, yet this archaic central institution continues to manage the product of our agricultural land. It was set up 67 years ago to deal with wartime conditions, but our federal governments – and that includes all of them since then – have either never figured out that these conditions have since changed or they assume that our farmers are not intelligent enough to make market decisions on their own. Now, this control has to end, because our farmers deserve the same market choices that eastern farmers and other Canadian industries have.

The Canadian Wheat Board justifies its monopoly by claiming that it has the farmers' best interests in mind. It's that old we know what's best for you mentality, and I intend that to be in the most sarcastic way. I'm not suggesting that this is a move to undermine Alberta farmers, but what's at stake here is whether the farmers can choose to be represented by the Wheat Board. It is after all the year 2002. All our markets are global, and why is it that only prairie

farmers are told what's best for them? I believe that the farmers are as capable as anyone else of choosing this for themselves.

Let's use the comparison of going to a stockbroker to manage your investments. Wouldn't you want to choose a broker that you are comfortable with? Wouldn't you want one that represents your best interests? Don't you think that the ability to make that choice yourself is rather essential? How would you like it if you had no choice in this regard? How would you feel if you were simply assigned a broker and your business was going to be lumped together with everyone else's?

Mr. Chairman, in view of the time I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

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

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

[Motion carried]

[Mr. Shariff in the chair]

MR. LOUGHEED: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports progress on Bill 207.

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

HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

THE ACTING SPEAKER: Opposed? So ordered.

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 adjourn until 8 p.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:17 p.m.]

