

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: **Thursday, March 20, 2003**

1:30 p.m.

Date: 2003/03/20

[The Speaker in the chair]

head: **Prayers**

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Our divine Father, as we conclude for this week our work in this Assembly, we renew our thanks and ask that we may continue our work under Your guidance. Amen.

Please be seated.

head: **Introduction of Guests**

Mrs. McClellan: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the staff of the communications branch of Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. We rely on these individuals day in and day out for a wide range of communication services. They are in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to stand and remain standing as I introduce them. First, director Terry Willock; assistant director David Hennig; public affairs officers Kerilyn Hamilton, Andrew Horton, Sharon Jensen, Marie McDonnell, and Michael Norris; and Louise McGinnis, branch administrator. I would ask that all members of the Assembly give our guests a very warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Deputy Premier just indicated, we also have some members of Municipal Affairs here as well as members of our intern program, perhaps the youngest staff of any part of Canada, and it's my pleasure to introduce those youthful-looking people that are part of Municipal Affairs today. We have – and I'd ask them to rise as I introduce them – Laura Buckingham, Cathy McEnaney, Christine Kendrick, Ian McCormack, Terry Brown, and Wendy Peters, and our interns are Rispah Kiptoo from Red Deer, Jayne McPhee from Spruce Grove, Brandy Cox from Beaver county, and June Wilson from the town of Millet. Please join me in welcoming them to the Assembly today.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Mr. Norris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We always talk about what a wonderful, glorious province Alberta is, and in that context I think we have to recognize the people who built and left us this glorious province, our seniors. Today it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you 24 members of MATT, which stands for the Mature Adults Third Thursday of Rio Terrace Moravian church. They are joining us here today. They're forming a group for the west end of Edmonton, which is going to be a remarkable benefit for all of us. They're here in the members' gallery and public gallery, and I would like all our colleagues to thank them for joining us and thank them for leaving us such a wonderful province.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to introduce through you and to the Assembly two wonderful people, John Buie and his son Nicolas Buie. John is the director of human resources and organizational effectiveness for the Department of Energy. I'd ask them to both rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly a visitor from New Brunswick. His name is Claude Laberge, and he is the principal of James M. Hill Memorial high school in Miramichi. Mr. Laberge has been here for the last two weeks, and in talking to him just prior to the session, I asked him why he had come here, and quite simply it was to see why Alberta students do so well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Mrs. O'Neill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly 31 visitors from Sir George Simpson school in St. Albert. They are seated in the public galley, and they are accompanied by their teachers, Mme Gabourie and Miss Walker, and by parent helpers Mr. St. Pierre, Ms Rowland, Mrs. Heatley, Mrs. Zimmel, Mrs. Thompson, and Mr. Wilkie. I would ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you today to all of the Assembly a group of students from Calgary. They are from the Queen Elizabeth high school. They're in grade 10. There are 42 of them here. They're accompanied by their teacher, Sarah MacLeod, and by two interpreters, since the school also includes people that are hard of hearing. So we have two interpreters. We have Dee-Dee Kay, and we have Laurel Villegas-Pryde and also a grandparent helper, Mrs. Roberta Leaver. So if these young people and their accompanying adults would stand, we would love to show you our appreciation.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Norwood.

Mr. Masyk: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two guests who are seated in the public gallery this afternoon. Shirley Saunders, who hails from Kelowna, B.C., was asked to participate in an intercessory prayer team at the G-8 summit held in Kananaskis, Alberta, on June 26 and 27, 2002. The second guest is my brain trust at the constituency office, my assistant, Joan Wynnyk. I would ask Joan and Shirley to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the great things about Canada is the success stories, and I'd like to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a fine Canadian success story today. Mr. Ernest Schultz is seated with two guests in the public gallery, and I'd ask him and his guests to rise if they could, please. Mr. Schultz was born into a pioneering homestead family in the Bashaw-Ponoka area. He grew up on a farm, served in the RCMP, and then went on to become a very successful car dealer and owner of car dealerships in both Alberta and B.C. He also happens to be my wife's uncle. I would ask all of you to give him and his guests a very warm welcome.

Mr. Loughheed: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to introduce to you and the members assembled Mr. Tom Pearson from Dow Chemical, a resident of Fort Saskatchewan and member of the chamber of commerce.

head: **Ministerial Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

Old Strathcona Fire

Mr. Norris: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and others. A week ago today a terrible thing happened in Edmonton. I'm talking, of course, about the fire in Old Strathcona. As you know, small business owners are the backbone of the Alberta economy, and our province is renowned as a land of risk-takers, entrepreneurs, and pioneers. As a former small business owner myself I know the passion with which these individuals pursue their business. It is truly a labour of love.

So today I'd like to extend our heartfelt condolences on behalf of the government to all those Old Strathcona business owners who lost their establishments last week in this tragic fire. I'm sure no words that I could say would accurately describe the loss that they feel. The neighbourhood is dear to all of us in Edmonton and, indeed, Alberta.

I would also like to comment on the bravery that was demonstrated by the firefighters of Edmonton in dealing with this, one of the most major fires we've had in a long time in the city of Edmonton and, indeed, the province of Alberta.

I'd like to leave you with a thought, though, Mr. Speaker. To the people of Strathcona. You've certainly lost the bricks and mortars but not the heart and passion that drove those small businesses. You will begin again, and when you do, know full well that the Alberta government will be supporting you in everything you do. In the meantime, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Official Opposition agrees that small business owners are the backbone of the Alberta economy. Also as a former small business owner I understand the dedication, commitment, and hard work these individuals undergo. The vibrancy that small businesses bring to our communities does not go unnoticed. The Old Strathcona small business owners who lost their businesses in last week's tragic fire played the additional role of preserving the extraordinary historical significance of this community in Edmonton.

We in the Official Opposition would like to extend our deepest condolences to the Old Strathcona business owners and their families who lost their businesses in the tragic fire. Also, we extend our condolences to the employees of these businesses who find themselves without employment after this horrible incident. Our thoughts and support are with them as they begin the process of rebuilding.

Additionally, we would like to thank all of the police and firefighters who worked so hard to save a real historic area of this city.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would like to request unanimous consent from the Assembly for the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona to make a brief response to the minister's statement.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank my colleagues for the consent that they have so generously granted.

Like all Edmontonians I was shocked and distressed by last week's fire that destroyed several buildings and family run businesses in Old Strathcona. Thankfully, no one was hurt or injured, though a number of animals at the Scales & Tails pet shop were lost.

Whyte Avenue is special. It's the cultural and artistic centre of the city. There's a piece of our history, and it's the pride of the south side neighbourhood that I'm proud to represent. It pains me that the heart of this vibrant area has a huge hole in it.

I salute the efforts of the firefighters who courageously fought the fire under extremely difficult circumstances and stopped it from destroying even more of our heritage.

As the MLA for the area I want residents and business owners in the area to know that I will work with the city, Old Strathcona Foundation, and the province to do whatever I can to assist the area and the business owners to rebuild. This setback will only be temporary. The spirit of Edmontonians is strong. I'm sure we will rebuild this part of Whyte Avenue in a way that reflects the history and vitality of Old Strathcona.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Oral Question Period**

Time Allocation

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, on December 4, 2002, the Premier told this House "that opposition, really dissent, is the essence of democracy. It is the fundamental underpinning of democracy." This government isn't practising what it preaches. It has invoked closure on controversial legislation at least 30 times since the Premier has come to power. My question to the Government House Leader: given that not all opposition members have had a chance to speak to Bill 3 and fairly represent their constituents, why is this government invoking closure through time allocation?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a novel concept that a Government House Leader might be called to account in question period, but I'm certainly happy to respond to the question on behalf of the government. Time allocation is a rule of this Assembly and, quite frankly, the rule of a number of Legislative Assemblies, including the federal House. I might just, in response to the question, point out that in the federal House time allocation is used routinely on almost every piece of business by the federal Liberal government. Time allocation, which is not closure but which is fair warning in significant advance of an event that there's going to be a limited amount of time left in committee, is an appropriate tool to let all members of the House know that once a sufficient amount of debate has occurred or a sufficient amount of time has been allowed for debate, there has to be an opportunity to move on. As all members know, debate is unlimited, potentially, in committee. A member can speak as many times as they wish to speak.

Now, if you take a look at, for example, the Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, which is one of the motions that's been put on notice for time allocation, there have been seven and a quarter hours of debate on the Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act. In that debate two members of the opposition have participated once, three members have participated twice, two members have participated three times, and two members have participated four times. In all that time, Mr. Speaker, particularly in committee – Liberal members participated for 187 minutes in committee, which is a line-by-line analysis of a bill – not one amendment has been introduced.

Dr. Nicol: To the Minister of Energy: is it the policy of this government to always limit debate about energy deregulation since the government also invoked closure on deregulation when it was last brought before this House, in 1998? [interjections]

The Speaker: I hope the Minister of Energy was able to hear that question.

Mr. Smith: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the Ministry of Energy has been actively involved in consultation on Bill 3 for a two-year period, culminating in this legislation brought before the House. As has been brought up in the House, a part of the consultation process was even to include the Member for Edmonton-Highlands on the consultation list. It has been discussed through various committees: the Alberta Advisory Council on Electricity, that was a multistakeholder group; the business improvement group subcommittee; the retail businesses subcommittee. This is the most consulted-on bill that I have ever been involved in.

Dr. Nicol: To the Minister of Human Resources and Employment: given that this government neglected to hold proper consultation and then went behind union's back and now threatens to stop debate, is it the policy of this government to trample the rights of workers without any input from the labour community?

Mr. Dunford: No, Mr. Speaker. I think there have been many times that the record would show where we've engaged in quite an extensive consultation. This time is different. There's no question about that. I think I've been open and candid with everyone, including the members of this House, that a request was made by one of the parties to a collective agreement process. We have responded to various requests that were made. As a matter of fact, to try to at least provide for information – I don't know that I could say consultation – hon. member, immediately after the joint press conference that we had with the Minister of Health and Wellness, I immediately proceeded upstairs in this building to a room where there were quite a number of union leaders in this province present. I think it was a half hour or more that we were able to then discuss some of the aspects of this particular bill.

I'd like to congratulate all of the people, then, that have spoken inside this Legislature about Bill 27. I think they've been very direct on what their opposition was. The positions have been articulated in a very forthright and clear manner, and I believe that most things that could be said in opposition to this bill probably already have been said.

Tuition Fees

Dr. Nicol: Tomorrow the University of Calgary makes an important decision. The board of governors will decide whether to make up for years of government underfunding by going to students for yet more tuition money, this time over 200 percent more money from some faculties. To the Minister of Learning: is it the minister's policy to put the faculties of law, medicine, and business out of the reach of middle- and low-income Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The University of Toronto just underwent a very interesting study. The University of Toronto has the highest tuition fee in the country for law, at \$16,000 per year. What they subsequently did was took a look at the socioeconomic status of the people who were entering law, and they

actually found that there was absolutely no difference from before they had increased tuition to now, when it is at \$16,000, what it actually is. In all fairness, the number of visible minorities was actually increased over this study, and it looks like it had no effect.

What the University of Calgary is doing is basically looking at differential tuition fees for three separate faculties. They're looking at it in business, law, and medicine. With regard to medicine the average yearly cost of a medical degree is very close to the \$75,000 to \$100,000 range, of which they will be paying – I believe that they looked at the number of around \$10,000. Typically what we tend to do, Mr. Speaker, is that university students would pay approximately, at most, 30 percent of the actual cost of their degree. The average in Alberta is around 24, 25 percent, so the government and every other funding source will be paying about 76 percent. What they are looking to do is bring medicine, for example, in line with the other faculties.

1:50

Dr. Nicol: Mr. Speaker, we won't get into the corrupt formula they use for calculating that 30 percent.

My next question is: why is increasing student debt the only solution this minister has to the problem of underfunding of universities?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta and the province of Alberta have about the second lowest student debt level in the country. It is roughly \$18,000 for a four-year undergraduate degree. We have by far the most generous student loan program, where those students that need it can achieve somewhere around \$11,000 per year, of which they will only pay back approximately \$5,000.

The other point that I will make is that the Liberal government in Ottawa also works with us in their student loan program, Mr. Speaker, and their remission to the students, to those kids that have gone through university and are now out working, is absolutely zero.

Dr. Nicol: Again to the minister: why doesn't the minister target funding to reduce tuition instead of increasing student loans, which only burdens students with a higher debt payment?

Dr. Oberg: Again, Mr. Speaker, the actual number – and I have found it – for university undergraduates is \$18,871, which is the second lowest in the country. It has been our goal in this government to provide dollars through the student loan program to those students who need it to attend university, and that's something that we have taken very strongly. We've increased the funding to student loans, to student financial assistance by very close to 50 percent over the last three years. In talking to the students, in talking to the student groups, they will certainly identify that the student loan program in Alberta is the number one student loan program right across Canada, and that's something we're very proud of.

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

Education Funding

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Angele Beaudoin, a parent in Edmonton-Whitemud, wrote to her MLA to let him know that her school plans to cut four full-time teachers, one half-time kindergarten teacher, as well as administrative and custodial support. She blames these cuts directly on the government's refusal to fund the arbitrated settlement with teachers and the lack of budget flexibility

allowed Edmonton public schools. My questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why, if the budget has been increased as much as the government claims it has, are such severe cuts being made at this school?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to reiterate what was said yesterday. There were two schools that were brought up in question period yesterday, Windsor Park school and McCauley school, and I believe that these two schools really illustrate the issue that is happening with Edmonton public today. Windsor Park school has 179 students, which is a small increase over last year. They employ 8.7 teachers. Their class size, according to the 2002-2003 class size study, which is a self-reported study, is 26.7 students. The utilization rate for that school is 82 percent, which is right in the range that we're looking for.

In contrast to that, Mr. Speaker, McCauley school, which is in Edmonton-Highlands, has 210 students, with a relatively flat enrollment growth. Their grades 1 to 6 size is 14.7 students, and the utilization rate for the school is 35 percent. So that's what's happening in the school.

What we're looking at with the audit of Edmonton public is how they distribute their dollars out. Obviously, there are some issues with that, but hopefully we will be able to elucidate more to the hon. member following the audit of Edmonton public.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the same minister: why, if the budget has increased, as the government claims, is it highly likely that over 200 schools in Edmonton public will be reducing staff next September?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to increasing money, I think the hon. member is very capable of looking in the budget and seeing what has happened over the past two years. We've seen a huge amount of increase, but in all fairness we have had a 14 percent increase to the teachers, which has put a strain on some of the districts. What you take a look at, the point that I just illustrated, is the problem with Edmonton public in how they distribute the dollars out to their schools. When we have one school that has a class size of 14.7 versus another school that has a class size of 26.7, what we have to do is ask the question: why? There may be a very valid reason. With school utilization, for example, 35 percent versus 82 percent, again we have to ask the question: why? That's what we are attempting to do in the audit of Edmonton public.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Massey: Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker: given that parents like Mrs. Beaudoin hold the government responsible, when will the minister, who found \$2 million to renovate his offices and \$7 million for Calgary public, find the \$13 million needed to prevent these cuts in Edmonton public schools?

Dr. Oberg: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, with the Edmonton public audit, as I've stated – maybe this member has got something in his ears and can't hear – we are already down approximately \$4 million to \$5 million, so it is not \$13.5 million.

On the other comment that the member made, I would invite the hon. Minister of Infrastructure to comment on the \$2 million that was used to renovate the offices and the amount of money that that has saved my department.

Dr. Pannu: Mr. Speaker, Old Scona academic high, in my riding of Edmonton-Strathcona, is the top ranked high school in Alberta. However, projected budget cuts threaten many of the programs that contribute to Old Scona's worldwide reputation for excellence. Every time the minister is confronted about the reality of these cuts, all he does is deny, deny, deny. Instead of Minister Lyle, we have Minister Denial. Once again my questions are to the Minister of Learning. Why is Old Scona academic high, a shining example of success in public education, facing a quarter million dollar shortfall in next year's budget?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I just gave you two examples of schools that are occurring in Edmonton public as we speak today. Old Scona – I found it very interesting because the hon. member over there usually does not like to rank schools, but all of a sudden he says that it is the number one school in the province, and it is – is very high in its scholastic achievement. But, again, there is a huge difference as to what is happening school to school in Edmonton, and what the audit of Edmonton public is attempting to do is look at why there is this difference. Why are some schools at 32 percent? Why are some schools at 90 percent or above? Why are they receiving similar amounts of dollars? This is one of the most intimate questions that we have to ask Edmonton public, and I'm hoping that by the end of next week we will be able to have the answer for the hon. member as well as for all the members of this Assembly and the general public.

The Speaker: The hon. member. No names.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were a hundred members present at the school council meeting last night, and they asked me to remind the minister of what's at stake, what you're risking in this school.

The Speaker: Work with me; okay? The hon. member knows that first of all he doesn't mention names of hon. members. Secondly, the hon. member knows that there are no preambles on the second question. The hon. member signed the agreement. Let's get the question, and let's move forward.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Other than deny, deny, deny, what's the minister going to do to fix the quarter million dollar hole in Old Scona academic high's budget? That's the question. Answer the question, Mr. Minister.

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, you know, again – I've said this probably 15 times in the Legislature – we are taking a look at Edmonton public, the total Edmonton public. We will have those audit results in, again, hopefully by the end of next week.

With regard to the \$13.5 million they don't have a \$13.5 million deficit. We have brought that down by a minimum of \$4 million to \$5 million. Hopefully, we will be able to have a firmer number by the end of next week and that we will be able to tell. What has happened in Edmonton public is that the superintendent has asked the schools to go down to 85 percent staffing level in their staffing. This is a level that is very consistent with what is across the province of Alberta. It's dropped. There were some schools that were running as high as 92, 93 percent. As I've already stated, one school had a class size of 14.7 students. So we'll wait and see. We'll see what happens at the end of next week. Hopefully, I'll be able to give the Assembly more answers.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My second supplementary to the same minister: why has the minister placed an arbitrary cap on grade 10 credits thereby denying high-achieving students an opportunity to reach their potential and leaving a \$100,000 hole in Old Scona's budget? Will he remove this cap?

Dr. Oberg: Mr. Speaker, I'll reiterate the answer that one of the hon. members asked me a few days ago. When it came to CEU funding in grade 10, what we saw was that at one point around the province there were over 200 students that were taking over 70 credits per year. There is not enough physical time in the school week to take 70 credits. We were seeing some schools that would award one credit for simply attending a school assembly. What that did is it allowed the schools to recoup approximately \$125 per student for having an assembly. So a thousand students, for example, would be \$125,000 that some of these schools were doing. As a matter of fact, for one particular school in Edmonton public – and I by no means state that that is the only school – we drew back \$250,000 a year ago. There was a huge problem.

What we have done since that time is we have looked at the funding formula, and we will be putting back CEUs come this fall, but there's going to be a significant difference. That difference is that the superintendent has to sign off the number of credits that each school brings forward. The board chairman has to sign off the number of credits that are coming from each school. The other thing that will happen is that as soon as there is a school that is more than two standard deviation units away from the norm, we will go in and investigate and ensure, quite simply, that the schools are telling the truth. We saw a huge difference in school jurisdictions, from 47 CEUs in some school jurisdictions to a low of around 32, with Calgary being at 37 or 38 and areas like Edmonton public being at 45 or 46.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Emergency Preparedness

Mr. Maskell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The missiles and bombs have begun to rain down on Baghdad. U.S. marines have entered southern Iraq. People around the world are glued to television and radio. Saddam Hussein has threatened retribution in the event Iraq was attacked. He stated that no place is safe. It's alleged that al-Qaeda has made similar threats. There has been intelligence that has listed possible terrorist targets in Canada, including sites in Alberta. We need to assure Albertans that we're doing everything possible to ensure their safety and security. My question is to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. As chair of the Ministerial Task Force on Security what steps have you taken in light of this information?

Mr. Jonson: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to assure the Assembly that a number of steps have been taken to ensure that Alberta has well prepared and well co-ordinated emergency and security plans in light of world events. We have improved our communication links with the federal government, the RCMP, and CSIS and with industry to ensure that information related to possible threats is shared with appropriate officials.

Coincidentally, cabinet approved Alberta's counterterrorism crisis management plan earlier this week. The plan is the result of long hours of work by a number of ministries in co-operation with other orders of government, intelligence agencies, and the private sector. Also, Mr. Speaker, it includes a comprehensive method of identifying critical infrastructure in the province and putting in place

appropriate security measures. The plan also includes a system for co-ordinating intelligence information.

Alberta, I think, Mr. Speaker, is more prepared than anyone else in the country at this point in time. To illustrate this, other provinces have been seeking information about what we're doing in Alberta so they can use our plan as a model for their security preparations.

Mr. Maskell: I have only one supplementary, and that's to the Solicitor General. What is the role of the security information management unit in Alberta's counterterrorism process?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister.

Mrs. Forsyth: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to reassure the members of this Assembly that at this time there is no identified threat in Alberta. My department is in continuous contact with intelligence agencies to ensure that we are informed of any information that could affect security in this province. As the minister mentioned, we are well ahead of everybody across this country and are getting calls from across this country.

We have created the security and information management unit, or SIM, as it is referred to, which co-ordinates intelligence and information about the threat level in Alberta in consultation with Alberta law enforcement services, Criminal Intelligence Service Alberta, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and the RCMP. We are in continuous contact with these agencies at all times.

Mr. Maskell: On second thought I do have a supplemental, and that's to the Minister of Municipal Affairs. How have you responded to the Auditor General's 2000-2001 report, which expressed concern over the co-ordination of government and municipal emergency plans in the province?

Mr. Boutilier: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A very good question. I want to say that we've made tremendous progress, as the hon. ministers have mentioned. I would like to say that we are upgrading our security systems on a continuous basis, ah, basis, and in fact we've installed . . . [interjection] No. That's where the secret bomb shelter is, but I'll comment on that at another time.

Ultimately, our existing emergency operation centre, the op centre – we've been working in partnership with municipalities from across all of Alberta, including, for example, the Vermilion fire school in partnership with Lakeland College.

As well, I want to just conclude by saying, Mr. Speaker, that we can never be one hundred percent ready, but what we can do is be best prepared in planning for, responding to, and recovering from. Our new op centre is opening in early spring. In fact, it will accommodate up to 75 members of our emergency management operation centre.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Asbestos Abatement at the Foothills Hospital

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. About 30 Alberta workers died last year from asbestos-related diseases. Thirty Alberta workers dead. We've been hammering away at this government for months on safe asbestos abatement in hospitals. Now we learn that last Friday, just days after the Calgary health region assured the public that there were no asbestos dangers at the Foothills, two stop-work orders were issued at the Foothills for unsafe asbestos removal. There have now been, I believe, 26 asbestos-related orders against the Foothills in two years. To the Minister of Human Resources and

Employment: given the Foothills' abysmal track record on asbestos removal, will the minister finally admit that the Foothills management is not taking this issue seriously?

Mr. Dunford: Mr. Speaker, with the situation last Friday the department was notified, as they were supposed to be, that a renovation was in progress that might involve asbestos. So there was a site inspection that did in fact take place, and from that two work orders were then issued. A worker was actually performing some activities in the ceiling space, where suspected asbestos-containing fireproofing was present. Now, this renovation area was not accessible to the public or to patients. As a matter of fact, we had a situation there where I think the worker was actually working alone.

In any event, what we have is an ongoing renovation of aged facilities, and asbestos is there. For every occasion where the inspection has called for an order or in fact placed a stop-work order and then asked for remedial activity, that has been done. So we have a situation where the employer in this particular case is responding, as employers should, to direction from workplace health and safety.

2:10

Dr. Taft: Mr. Speaker, responding after the fact is too late. There have been 26 orders in two years.

So given there have been 26 orders in two years, is his department finally considering occupational health and safety charges against Foothills management?

Mr. Dunford: No, not at this time because the normal series of events is that we get notified about the work that's in progress. We take a look at what is happening. The orders provide for the activity then to be done in a safe manner and to prevent, of course, exposure in the air of any workers or any people associated with the Foothills situation. So they have hired an abatement supervisor that is working with them as well, and we'll continue to monitor it.

I think I mentioned here in the House some time ago that this was a major project and it was something that workplace health and safety in the Calgary division were focused on and probably taking up more of our resources, Mr. Speaker, than what ordinarily would happen.

So as long as we have compliance, there's no room, then, for charges.

Dr. Taft: Very disappointing.

To the Minister of Infrastructure: given the taxpayers' risk of huge liability costs from asbestos exposure, has this government done the prudent thing and followed other Canadian governments in filing a claim to recover costs from the bankruptcy of several U.S. asbestos manufacturers?

Mr. Lund: Mr. Speaker, when we are dealing with a building that has asbestos in it, depending on the project we will first of all make sure that there is somebody on-site that is expert as far as the handling of asbestos and what needs to be done with it. If it's a major thing like a demolition and depending, once again, on the magnitude of it – the General hospital in Calgary is a good example. The firm that was part of the demolition had to have that expertise. But to go one step further to protect the workers and the public, we hired another firm to watch the firm that was doing the removal.

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

Soil Contamination Cleanup

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week many of my constituents are following with great interest a judicial review hearing related to the cleanup of hydrocarbon and lead contamination that was discovered almost two years ago in Lynnview Ridge in my constituency of Calgary-Fort. It is my understanding that the review revolves around the scope of the cleanup. Imperial Oil, who used to operate an oil refinery at the site until the late 1970s, is being required by Alberta Environment to remove and replace the contaminated soil. My first question is to the hon. Minister of Environment. While I know that we can't go into the specific details while the hearing is going on, can the minister please explain what is involved in a judicial review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As correctly identified, the hearing is going on, and I can't comment, obviously, on any specifics.

In terms of a judicial review what is happening is that the department has made a decision, and the court is reviewing the decision. Perhaps the Minister of Justice would like to comment further on the legal issues around a judicial review.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. As my constituents are very anxious to see the situation resolved, could this judicial review result in any further delay in resolving this situation?

Speaker's Ruling Sub Judice Rule

The Speaker: Well, I think the hon. minister was quite correct. If there's a judicial review going on here – and it can only be substantiated by a response from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General – these questions could be quite sub judice and outside the mandate of this Assembly. I can't respond to that, but we've had two questions. Proceed with your third one, hon. member. You may get nothing out of it.

Soil Contamination Cleanup (continued)

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My final question is to the Minister of Justice. Is there another way, such as arbitration or mediation, that the residents can have their interests addressed without having to take the matters to court?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, when a matter is before a judicial review, that's the same as any other matter being before the courts, and the content of the matter itself ought not to be commented upon, but I can provide some comment with respect to processes. We, of course, have the regulatory processes and the provisions under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act which allow for people to take decisions of that nature through a judicial review process, and that, as I understand it, is what's happening in this case. But, of course, there's also the opportunity for anyone who has any grievance relative to a wrongful act of somebody or a perceived wrongful act which has caused them damage to bring a tort action in the civil courts.

Of course, we have been very strongly advocating that people use what is commonly known as alternative dispute resolutions in terms of going to mediation if all parties will agree to participate. So we would strongly encourage individuals who do not wish to use the judicial review process or find that that process is not effective for their particular dispute area to examine the opportunities to use alternative dispute resolutions such as mediation, and if necessary they can always go through the acute care system of the courts to have any issues determined in that manner. Alternative dispute resolution, mediation, arbitration processes have proved very successful for many people, and where the regulatory process is inappropriate or cumbersome or doesn't provide an effective result, those alternative processes can be very effective.

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

Energy Deregulation

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every Thursday the Alberta Liberals will ask a question that members of the public have asked us to pose. Albertans can send us their questions by phoning our office or visiting our web site at altaliberals.ab.ca. Today's question about energy deregulation comes from Mr. Bruce Thomas of Edmonton. My first question is to the Minister of Energy. Given that the provincial government's legislation promises rebates whenever natural gas prices average \$5.50 over a year, would Albertans who sign a contract for five years at the current rate of \$7.25 automatically qualify for rebates?

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the preamble is wrong. The Natural Gas Price Protection Act does not relate to energy deregulation. The average annual price is one that's calculated triggered at \$5.50, and in fact for January it was \$5.88. The important part about the rebates that are triggered in the natural gas price protection plan is that when that price occurs, the rebate is made to everyone regardless of whether they've entered into a long-term contract or they're on spot rate.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why isn't the trigger for natural gas rebates based on a price that consumers actually see on their bills?

Mr. Smith: That's actually a very good question. A very good question, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I'm in fact glad the member gave his proper credit due to a member of the public for putting that question in. That specific part is one that we want to examine when the regulation expires in July. So we will undertake that examination for Mr. Thomas.

Secondly, one of the reasons why it's structured with the amount that's in there is because that's how we collect the money from royalties so that we have the proper amount of funds that we are in fact able to rebate to Albertans across the province.

Mr. MacDonald: Again, Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that as a result of this government's energy deregulation consumers in this province have seen nothing but their utility bills skyrocket, can the minister please explain who benefits economically from energy deregulation?

Mr. Smith: I would strongly like to see proof that Mr. Thomas

wrote the preamble for the last question. Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the benefits economically are many, and they're to all Albertans. In fact, they accrue from investment; they accrue in the small business sector.

Now, maybe the Minister of Economic Development could better outline what happens to the small business sector.

2:20

Mr. Norris: Recognizing the time constraints, Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief on this, but, yes, I would like to say at the outset that businesses in Alberta are facing challenges of a number of different natures: insurance costs, high prices of labour, and things of that nature. But the facts of the matter are that Alberta is a remarkable place and continues to be the best place in the nation for all of the various economic indicators, and I'll just list a few of them that are facts. They're not fiction. As far as capital investment, the highest in Canada for the last five years. As far as GDP growth, the highest in Canada for the last five years. As far as net in-migration into the province, the highest in Canada. Net interprovincial migration, the highest in Canada. On and on it goes.

You can feel it in the economy. It's growing. It continues to grow. As I said two years ago, electrical deregulation and prices are one part of the equation. The Alberta advantage is a major, major advantage in low, broad-based taxes, a government that works and respects business, a government that understands that business drives the economy. It is working, Mr. Speaker, because our economy continues to grow and does not falter even though there are these challenges. Alberta businesses are the best in the world.

The Speaker: Hon. Minister of Learning, you want to rise at the conclusion of question period on a point of order?

Dr. Oberg: That's right.

The Speaker: Okay. The appropriate procedure is to do it at the time. I need to know what exchange there was with other members.

Dr. Oberg: Edmonton-Mill Woods.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods. Okay. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Graduated Drivers' Licences

Mrs. Ady: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the May 20 deadline approaches for the new graduated licence program, I've been receiving many questions from 15- and 16-year-old constituents as well as their parents. My understanding is that there will be three stages to this program: the learner, the probationary driver, and the fully licensed driver. My questions are for the Minister of Transportation. The confusion seems to surround the curfew. Can the minister tell me at what stage there will be a curfew for drivers that says that they cannot drive between midnight and 5 a.m.?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, in the province of Alberta the curfew will only apply to the learner stage. So regardless of age, if it's an inexperienced driver filing for a driver's licence, they will go through a learner stage. It's during the learner stage only that is from the midnight to 5 a.m. In the second stage, the probationary stage, there is no curfew.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Ady: Thank you. My first supplemental goes again to the Minister of Transportation. If you were to receive your learner's permit before May 20, you could go and get a probationary licence almost immediately. After May 20 how long before you can receive a probationary licence?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, again, depending on age. If you were over 16 years old and you entered into the process in terms of applying for a licence, you would go through the learner stage and then, of course, proceed into the probationary. All of those individuals that have their learner's permit at this particular time will go through the regular process, including at the end of the probationary period an exit exam.

Mrs. Ady: My final supplemental again to the same minister: for clarification does this mean that my constituents will now be taking two road tests and paying for it twice?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, clearly, evidence across this country shows that new drivers are twice as likely to be involved in an accident as experienced drivers, and given the huge cost to society – I believe the Alberta Motor Association has pegged it at about \$3.8 billion to this province on an annual basis – we are as a result of some good work done by many members here, in fact the Member for Red Deer-South, introducing the graduated driver's licence for that very specific purpose, and that is to save lives.

There will be two exams. There will be the actual exam for the probationary licence at the completion of the probationary period. Again, it has to be suspension free for the last 12 months of the period. Then they will write what is called the exit exam. We are just developing and designing the exit exam at this particular time, consulting with all stakeholders, looking at the experiences of exit exams in other provinces like British Columbia and Nova Scotia. Mr. Speaker, I'm looking forward to the day that we can reduce the number of incidents in this province similar to the history in B.C. and Nova Scotia, which is about 30 percent.

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

Canada/U.S. Relations

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are compelling economic and security reasons for Canada and the United States to ensure that the Canada/U.S. border remains open for trade, tourism, and investment but becomes less vulnerable to disruption by terrorists and other threats. My questions today are to the Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations. What is this minister doing to ensure that this province, this country, and the States are developing long-term policy on security and immigration where there would be broad agreement between all parties?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Jonson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I would just like to note that immigration is a federal responsibility. However, it is very important to our cultural and economic fabric here in the province, and it is something that we are certainly giving priority to and keeping an eye on with respect to recent developments.

Now, with regard to border security I can say that officials from my ministry recently met with representatives from the federal department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Alberta made it very clear to the federal government that keeping border

disruptions to a minimum is our highest priority, and we expect the federal government to do all it can to ensure that that happens. Also, we very clearly told federal officials that continued co-operation between the U.S. and Canada is essential to ensure the free movement of goods and products between our two countries.

Alberta continues to insist on more co-operation from the federal government on priority issues like border security and infrastructure security and continental defence and bilateral trade. Ottawa assured us at this recent meeting that the smart border accord with the U.S. is minimizing border delays, and that accord is an agreement between the United States and Canada to ensure potential border disruptions do not jeopardize the health of our economies.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, what is this minister doing to ensure that border restrictions are functional and don't necessarily harass people who need to cross the borders frequently?

Mr. Jonson: Mr. Speaker, we would certainly share the hon. member's concerns because that is a very critical matter that needs to be addressed. I can say that the people who developed Alberta's counterterrorism crisis management plan worked very closely with the RCMP, CSIS, and the Department of National Defence. Those organizations are in close contact with the FBI and Homeland Security in the United States as is our federal government and the American government. Alberta is making its counterterrorism crisis management plan available to other provinces, and we are working in that regard.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, we feel that the federal government is making a major effort. They are putting resources into working with the province of Ontario, in particular, where there are border crossing challenges and difficulties, and we are also monitoring the situation with respect to our access to the United States, basically through, for the most part, Montana, to make sure that every effort is being made to keep the trade, the trucks, the vehicles moving, the tourists moving, the immigration matter being kept up to date and moving smoothly.

Ms Carlson: Mr. Speaker, can the minister tell us what he's doing at this time to discuss with businesses how they are going to facilitate their business transfers across the borders during this next crucial time period?

Mr. Jonson: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that this is an issue our federal government has been working on closely with the United States through the smart border accord, and Alberta certainly supports any efforts that are being made in that regard to ensure, as I've said, the free movement of goods and people across our border with the United States. However, we have to acknowledge that we are living in some very troubled times with some issues in this particular area being very touchy, so to speak, and they have to be dealt with very carefully.

The Alberta government does recognize the right of the United States to take appropriate steps to ensure their border security, and the Alberta government will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that there is as little disruption as possible in the passage of people and goods between the United States and Canada.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Learning to supplement?

Dr. Oberg: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister responsible for immigration in this government I would bring to the hon. member's attention that I will be meeting with my federal counterpart tomorrow morning to discuss some of these very issues.

Mr. Mason: Maybe he's also the defence minister, Mr. Speaker.

Energy Rebates

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are receiving their natural gas bills this week, and their reaction is probably unprintable and unparliamentary. Most Albertans paid more for natural gas this winter than ever before. For example, one Edmonton homeowner had bills this winter of over \$748 for a three-month period, higher than he would have paid in the year 2001 without rebates. My questions are to the Minister of Energy. Why won't the minister just admit that the only reason homeowners received rebates in 2001, when bills were even lower than today, was because an election was just on the horizon?

An Hon. Member: Patently untrue.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, a comment on the bench here is that it's patently untrue, and it is patently untrue. In fact, if I remember correctly that turbulent time of the year 2000, there was also an Alberta dividend paid to all Albertans in the preceding period, November-December, that was two times \$150. This was the first experience that this government had with a spiraling gas cost, the commodity price itself. They responded, and they responded appropriately. It occurred at a time when other events were taking place as well, but the government certainly responded.

Afterward, Mr. Speaker, we were asked to put a program in place. We have put a program in place. We've maintained our belief in market forces, but we have not lost our compassion, our compassion for seniors, our compassion for those who do need the assistance. Those programs have been put in place this year, and they have benefited people in their time of need.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, can the minister please tell the Assembly if the cost of giving consumers a \$1 billion rebate program in 2001 has been declared as an election expense by the Conservative Party?

The Speaker: The hon. member, third question.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Well, since the minister chooses not to answer that question, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Please, please. Party matters are not part of the question period routine. Hon. member, it wasn't a question of the minister not answering the question. The minister could not answer the question.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to know from this government whether or not they are willing to repay the Alberta treasury the \$1 billion in election payoffs that they offered before the last election since it clearly wasn't a rebate program. They don't have one now.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the time for question period has now elapsed. Let me just indicate that on Monday of this week the House dealt with 15 sets of questions; on Tuesday, 15 sets of questions; on Wednesday, 14 sets of questions; and today, 11 sets of questions. So, all in all, pretty good. We could've had a few more today; that would've been good.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Fourteenth Anniversary of Election

The Speaker: I would also like to point out before we call on the

first member for Members' Statements that 14 years ago today, March 20, 1989, the following members earned their right to participate in this House: first of all, the hon. the Premier, the MLA for Calgary-Bow; the hon. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake; the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development and the MLA for Athabasca-Wabasca; the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and the MLA for Rocky Mountain House; the hon. Minister of Finance and MLA for Calgary-Foothills; the hon. Minister of Seniors and the MLA for Stony Plain; and the hon. Deputy Speaker and the MLA for Highwood.

head: **Members' Statements**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Water Strategy

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pause for a moment if you will and think about where our province would be if it were not for our water resources. Farming and ranching in our province would be dead, the forest industry closed down, power generation would be crippled, and our now vibrant cities would be emptied of their people.

Life in this province, in all provinces, depends on water. For too long this government has taken Alberta's water resources for granted. Water has been an issue in this province for more than one decade, and what does this government have to show? No strategy, no management plan, no conservation plan. Nothing. And what does the Minister of Environment tell us? He says that there has not been enough time. He says that this government needs more than a decade to produce a water strategy for this province. In fact, when I questioned the minister in this House, he wouldn't even commit to have the water policy by next year. Meanwhile, Albertans struggle with their water shortage problems, living with stopgap measures from their government.

At the same time, the Official Opposition has presented numerous plans and solutions to address Alberta's water crisis. The opposition has repeatedly pressed for a water resource inventory, universal metering, a clean water strategy alliance, and water conservation incentives. Our solutions would ensure that Albertans have a plentiful supply of clean water now and into the future. Our solutions would also ensure that Alberta's ecosystems are treated in a manner that promotes sustainability and conservation.

Despite all of our suggestions this government has dragged its heels on a meaningful water policy for the last 10 years and has instead relied on stopgap measures. Finally, after much prompting, the Minister of Environment promised to show Albertans at the end of this month a draft of a provincial water strategy. We have waited for more than a decade. It had better be a good one.

Thank you.

Dr. Taylor: Your plan wasn't very good, Kevin. There are only seven of you.

Mr. Bonner: Without interruption?

The Speaker: Was that the cat calling the kettle black? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Glengarry without any interruptions? Rather aggressive this week. I think it has something to do with the full moon.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Montrose.

International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Mr. Pham: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, March 21.

The United Nations first recognized this day in 1966 and designated it in memory of the anti-apartheid demonstrators killed or injured in Sharpeville, South Africa, in 1960. Canada was one of the first countries to support this United Nations declaration, and it began recognizing the day on a national basis in 1989.

Recognition of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is particularly important this year considering the international terrorist crisis around the globe and the major conflict in the Middle East. Social harmony and peace are important and are only possible if we find ways to understand, value, and respect people of all races, religions, and ethnicity.

We are fortunate in Canada to have people with a wide variety of skills and experience who contribute to our communities and to have a rich mosaic of cultures woven into the strong fabric of our province and our nation. Let us celebrate the uniqueness of each individual and culture. Let us embrace a vision of Alberta where everyone has access to social, economic, and cultural opportunities on a fair and equal basis regardless of cultural or visible differences. We can, by working together, create an Alberta free of racial discrimination.

As chair of the Advisory Committee on the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Education Fund, I ask you join the community and the committee in working toward this goal.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Dave Irwin

Mrs. Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to recognize a constituent and friend, Mr. Dave Irwin, one-time Olympian, an original Crazy Canuck, and a member of the Canadian downhill ski team from 1971 to 1982.

Dave recently organized and took part in the Dash for Cash downhill race at Sunshine Village on the same mountain that nearly killed him two years ago. Most of us will remember the terrible ski accident where Dave suffered severe head injuries and was hospitalized for three months, injuries that many people would not have survived. Not only do some consider it a miracle that Dave was skiing at this event, but it is even more incredible that he had one of the fastest times as a forerunner.

The Dash for Cash was the first major fund-raiser for the Dave Irwin Brain Injury Foundation and will become an important and I'm sure very popular annual event. On March 8 of this year, 22 teams of four and over 40 volunteers braved frigid weather and raised nearly \$50,000, money that will be put in an endowment fund to support research, awareness and prevention programs, and aid for those living with brain injury.

Dave's positive attitude and determination have contributed to his remarkable near-full recovery, and he truly is an inspiration to all of us. As a brain injury survivor, Dave is now using his talent and skill to help others and is working to remove the social stigma against people with brain injuries.

Please join me in congratulating Dave on the success of his fund-raiser and in wishing him all the best on his continuous road to recovery. On behalf of Albertans, thank you, Dave, for your major contributions to the people of this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

2:40

Iraq Conflict

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is a tragic day in the history of our shared humanity. It is the day that the leaders of the world's most powerful nation, the United States, chose to commit an act of unprovoked aggression against a much smaller and less powerful nation.

In the aftermath of the Second World War the United Nations was established to prevent unprovoked aggression. The UN Charter specifically prohibits powerful nations from launching wars of aggression against less powerful nations. The war against Iraq sets a very dangerous precedent. After regime change in Iraq, who is next? North Korea? Iran? Venezuela? Canada? The doctrine of pre-emption can be invoked by countries other than the United States against their less powerful neighbours. It will lead to greater proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as smaller countries arm themselves to better repel aggression. It will not make the world safer but rather much more dangerous.

Not only is the war against Iraq destabilizing; it is also unnecessary. Since last November weapons inspectors have been on the ground in Iraq working unimpeded. All of the U.S. and British intelligence leads claiming that Iraq was hiding illegal weapons were in the words of one of the inspectors: garbage, garbage, and more garbage.

The Canadian peace movement deserves a tremendous amount of credit for moving the federal government to opt out of the Bush/Blair war of aggression against Iraq. So does the federal NDP under the leadership of Alexa McDonough and Jack Layton, who have been saying since last fall that this war is illegal and wrong.

When the Premier ties himself up in knots pledging solidarity with the most retrograde elements of the Bush administration, he does a disservice to Albertans. In doing so, the Premier does not speak for millions of Albertans who deplore this war of aggression. The Premier claims to be protecting Alberta's interest in speaking out. By invading Iraq, the U.S. is seeking to re-establish control over the world's oil reserves. Counteracting OPEC to push oil prices down has been a cornerstone of American policy for decades. Low oil prices in the long term mean less exploration, less oil sands investment, and lower royalty revenues for the government. It means . . . [Mr. Mason's speaking time expired]

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to present a petition to the Assembly, please, and it is signed by 25 people from across the province, and they're petitioning the government here.

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the provincial government to establish a provincially subsidized monthly transit pass program for low income Albertans that would apply to all municipalities with a public transit system.

Thank you.

head: **Notices of Motions**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Deputy Government House Leader I rise pursuant to Standing Order 34(2)(a) to give notice that on Monday he will move that written questions

appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places and also to give notice that on Monday he will move that motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper do stand and retain their places.

head: **Introduction of Bills**

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Employment.

Bill 32
Income and Employment Supports Act

Mr. Dunford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 32, the Income and Employment Supports Act.

This bill will bring different programs together under one piece of legislation and make the processes for delivering them clearer and fairer. It reflects the recommendations of the MLA committee to review low-income programs and of course the advice of thousands of Albertans. They call for income supports and employment supports to be brought together so that we can shift the focus from programs to people.

[Motion carried; Bill 32 read a first time]

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of tablings today. This tabling is on behalf of the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona. It's a review of the Old Scona academic high school's finances, showing concerns about the anticipated funding shortfall.

I'd like to table an e-mail from someone from Spruce Grove to the minister, and it says: "That giant hissing sound is the sound of money being sucked out of Albertans' pockets."

Mr. Speaker, this is an e-mail from a Morinville senior, and he says that large gas lines "to export our natural gas out of this country . . . is good for Alberta's economy but I don't think it should be done at the expense of seniors and low income" Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a power bill from Ardrossan with a comment from the citizen that the cost has nearly doubled due to deregulation.

Another power bill from Morinville, Mr. Speaker. This one says: "This is ridiculous, 4 times what it should be. We are going to move to another province before we have to lose our house."

This is an e-mail from a constituent of mine, Mr. Speaker, and it says: "I believe the government has to do something to lower the costs of rising energy costs . . . Something [has] to be done."

Mr. Speaker, this is a power bill from Edmonton with the comment, "Thank you for speaking on our behalf to what seems like a deaf ear."

This is an e-mail to my office, Mr. Speaker. It says: I would love to come up with energy saving devices and put them in place, but with prices steadily rising, I can't afford to buy any of the items.

Mr. Speaker, this is an e-mail from a single person who is paying one-third of the cost of her mortgage on her utilities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling today a letter to Minister Woloshyn . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, please, please, please. You know about the thing about the names. I must have said it six times this week.

Mr. Mason: I apologize: to the Minister of Seniors. I quote in part from seniors voicing their displeasure with regard to the deregulation of utilities: "It has been a fiasco."

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a letter and some utility bills from St. Albert, and the citizen comments, "It is virtually impossible for our usage to double from one year to the next," yet the charges are double.

Mr. Speaker, this is an e-mail from one of my constituents. I'm quoting, but I won't quote the name. I'll just say that he says that the Premier "should wake up and realize . . . that all people are not in his income bracket."

Mr. Speaker, this is a letter I'm tabling from a stay-at-home mom. She says, "When are we going to see the beneficial prices we were told were coming?"

Mr. Speaker, this is a letter from 102 residents at River Ridge on fixed incomes. They indicate that an increase in condo fees has resulted from high utility costs.

Mr. Speaker, this is a letter from some citizens in Edmonton regarding their ATCO bill. It says in block letters: "We are . . . outraged." "Thank you so much."

An e-mail from a constituent. This citizen uses \$40 worth of power and is paying over \$100 worth of service charges.

Mr. Speaker, this is a letter and some bills from Daysland, and I quote the citizens: "Our natural gas bills and power bills are outrageous . . . Mr. Premier, we are sitting here freezing in the dark."

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a letter and some utility bills from Red Deer, and the citizen indicates, "I may lose my house as I cannot keep up."

This is a bill with some written comments from St. Albert indicating, "We do not keep any lights on."

This is an e-mail I am tabling from a citizen, Mr. Speaker, and they indicate: do I need to turn off the thermostat and freeze the pipes in the house?

Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a bill from Edmonton with a note from the citizen: there has to be some help.

This bill I'm tabling next, Mr. Speaker, is from Whitecourt. The citizen indicates: my cost per month has doubled.

These are some bills that I'm tabling from a constituent of mine, Mr. Speaker. The comment: there have been more power outages in the rural areas since privatization, and the response time is much longer, approximately six to eight hours.

I'm tabling a bill from Battle River. The citizen comments: the add-ons are disturbing figures.

I'm tabling a bill from a citizen in St. Albert who says: thank you for bringing this to Premier Klein's attention.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:50

The Speaker: Please. This is a real problem for me. It is now the seventh time, the second time in the last 10 minutes, that you mention names. Well, there seems to be a wall here with respect to this.

Maybe we can come back for tablings with you next Monday; okay?

We'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings this afternoon. The first is a commentary from the C.D. Howe Institute, and it is entitled California Shorts a Circuit. It is about the electricity deregulation there.

The second tabling I have is on behalf of a constituent. It's a letter addressed to the hon. Premier, and it is from Laura Webster. Ms

Webster is expressing her concern about funding cutbacks and what they're doing to her local school in Kenilworth.

The third tabling I have is also addressed to our hon. Premier and dated February 25. It is from Kevin Whitton, the chair of the school council at Kenilworth junior high. Mr. Whitton is expressing concern about next year's budget for the school as a result of this government's policies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have four tablings today, all having to do with education. The first is from Karen Ferrari, a constituent of mine who attended the public gallery on March 19. She's expressing her grave concerns over education funding and also asks for an apology for the comments and groans by the Premier and government MLAs.

The second tabling is a letter to the Minister of Community Development from Melanie Shapiro. Among other things, she says, "Parents are all asking why the Government cannot fund education as a priority."

The third tabling is from Jenn Hoogewoonink to the Premier and the Minister of Learning. Among many things, she says, "We cannot smother concerns of scarcity in education when it directly affects who we are or who we can possibly become."

The fourth tabling is from Linda Telgarsky, a copy of a letter to the Premier and the Minister of Learning. She says, among other things, "I am concerned about the current situation regarding the funding of public schools."

Thank you.

The Speaker: Additional members? Additional tablings?

head: **Projected Government Business**

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Ms Carlson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask that the government now share with us what they expect to be the business of next week.

Mr. Hancock: I expect that next week will be taken up with further debate, additional and comprehensive debate, on Bill 27, Bill 3, and Bill 19.

To be more specific, on Monday, March 24, at 9 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders I would expect that we might take up government motions 14 and 16 and then proceed to Committee of the Whole on Bill 27 and Bill 3 and as per the Order Paper.

On Tuesday, March 25, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading Bill 27, Bill 3, and Bill 19, and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for third reading Bill 27, Bill 3, Bill 19, and Bill 30 and as per the Order Paper.

Wednesday, March 26, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading Bill 27, Bill 19, Bill 3 and as per the Order Paper. At 8 p.m. under Government Bills and Orders for third reading Bill 27, Bill 19, Bill 3 and as per the Order Paper.

Thursday, March 27, in the afternoon under Government Bills and Orders for third reading Bill 27, Bill 19, Bill 3 and as per the Order Paper.

The Speaker: On a point of order, the hon. Minister of Learning.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today under Standing Order 23(h), which states, "makes allegations against another member." In the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods' preamble he stated – and unfortunately I have not yet had the Blues – that there were \$2 million in renovations spent in my office. As the hon. member fully knows, this was money that was spent in moving 470 of my staff from one building to another building, and that lease change saved the provincial government and the taxpayers of this province \$3.4 million net. He has made a direct allegation against myself personally that I spent \$2 million on renovations to my office. I stand corrected if that is not what is printed in the Blues, but that is what I feel that he said.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Dr. Massey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, it wasn't in the preamble. It was in my third question. What I actually said was: who found \$2 million to renovate his offices.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods said:

Thank you. Again to the same minister, Mr. Speaker. Given that parents like Mrs. Beaudoin hold the government responsible, when will the minister who found \$2 million to renovate his offices and \$7 million for Calgary public find the \$13 million needed to prevent these cuts in Edmonton public schools?

The hon. minister said:

Mr. Speaker, again with the Edmonton public audit as I've stated, maybe this member has got something in his ears and can't hear, but we are already down approximately \$4 million to \$5 million, so it is not \$13.5 million.

The other comment that the member made: I would invite the hon. Minister of Infrastructure to comment on the \$2 million that was used to renovate the offices and the amount of money that that has saved my department.

There was no further intervention by any other minister.

"When will the minister who found \$2 million to renovate his offices . . ." Well, it strikes me that this is a point of clarification. Ministerial responsibility involves the taking of responsibility for everything under one's portfolio, one's department, and I suppose that in the most extreme interpretation, when the member says, "who found \$2 million to renovate his offices," he's assuming that the minister must assume responsibility for all the offices in his department.

Regardless of what it is, it was an opportunity for the minister to respond. Not the best words in the world – and maybe we've dealt with this as a point of clarification, with the House recognizing, as well, that sometimes we have to accept two contradictory views of the same situation – but a useful intervention for clarification. We all know it was not the Minister of Learning that spent \$2 million on, quote, his offices in the building. I don't believe that the Minister of Infrastructure, as a result of all its petitions from the Speaker over the last six years, would have even spent that much on the whole system.

head: **Statement by the Speaker**

Private Members' Public Bills

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've had a number of questions from hon. members with respect to the order of business on Monday, and I want to make the following statement in order to clarify as a result of a number of private members consulting with me in the last several days. It has to do with clarification to all members regarding

the sequence in which private members' bills will be called for debate this Monday, March 24.

Standing Order 9(1) states that "all items standing on the Order Paper, [with the exception of] Government Bills and Orders, shall be taken up according to the precedence." As all members are aware, Standing Order 8(5) provides that a private member's bill must be called in Committee of the Whole within eight sitting days of receiving second reading and within four sitting days after being reported by Committee of the Whole.

Sometimes these time lines will conflict depending upon the progress of various bills. In such cases the order of precedence is determined by the date and the time that the Assembly or the Committee of the Whole has made its decisions in respect of the bills. Therefore, given that Bill 201 received third reading on March 10, it must be the first item of business called on Monday afternoon. Committee of the Whole consideration of Bill 203 will then follow, and if time permits, the next item of business to be called will be third reading of Bill 202.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Government Motions**

Time Allocation on Bill 19

15. Mr. Hancock moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 19, Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2003, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill at Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of this stage of the bill shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In moving Government Motion 15, I would just advise the House that notwithstanding two news releases by the Official Opposition relative to the death of democracy as we know it, the fact of the matter is that 7.17 hours of debate have been undertaken on the Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act to date, including five hours in committee. As we've just heard under Projected Government Business, there are three bills on the Order Paper for discussion next week at committee and third reading, of which Bill 19 is one. So in addition to the 7.17 hours spent to date, there will be an additional hour in committee and then, of course, the full opportunity in third reading for any member to get on the record any concerns that they might have with respect to the bill.

3:00

In speaking to the time allocation motion, I would remind the House, as I had the opportunity to do thanks to the timely interjection of the Leader of the Opposition affording me the opportunity, that time allocation is a parliamentary procedure that's used in many parliaments around the world. Not that we'd want to follow the lead, ever, of the federal Liberal government, it's used on almost every bill, I think, in the federal House. It's certainly used extensively in the federal House.

But that's not the way we use time allocation in this House. It's a new procedure that's used relatively rarely. In the year 2000 it was used five times. In the year 2000 time allocation was used five times. In the year 2001 it was not used at all. We do have three bills that need to be dealt with before the end of the month, one of them being the gas utilities bill. So I'm moving Government Motion 15 today to deal with that.

Lest anyone suggest that they haven't had an opportunity to do line-by-line analysis in Committee of the Whole, I would indicate that the official Liberal opposition has spent 187 minutes, during which they introduced not one amendment. The New Democrat opposition spent 68 minutes, a full hour and then some, and introduced not one amendment. Members of the opposition have spoken a total of 22 times already on this bill. So although it is a big bill and a complex bill and a very important bill, there has been no lack of opportunity for members of the opposition to let government know and let Albertans know and let this House know what their views are with respect to every aspect of the bill.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is not inappropriate I think at this time to ask the House to consider that although endless debate is allowed in committee and any member has the opportunity to speak as many times as they want in committee under the rules of the House, once two members of the opposition have spoken four times and two members have spoken three times and three members have spoken twice and two members have spoken once and all members have had the opportunity to speak, then to suggest that a further hour of debate in committee might get us through committee, sufficiently allowing the opportunity to introduce any further amendments, or any amendments in this case, because they haven't introduced any amendments, and then we'd move on to further debate in third reading – I'd ask the House to support the motion.

The Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 21(3) allows one member of the Official Opposition to participate for up to five minutes. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is the participant?

Ms Carlson: Yes.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, to say to the hon. Minister of Justice that I'm disappointed is to be in these circumstances polite. Not only do we have Motion 15, Motion 14, we have Motion 16.

Now, when we talk about democracy, it always comes back to the words of the hon. Premier, Mr. Speaker, and those words were uttered in the election in 1997 in Fort McMurray: I believe in free speech as long as you say the right thing. When we have this bill before the Assembly and to learn that the government is going to limit and restrict and close debate and to compare their record with the federal government – the federal government has used closure eight times, whereas this government, with our research, in the last 10 years has used closure at least 30 times. One time was with the electricity bill, going back to Bill 27 I believe in 1998. Closure was invoked on that bill, and since that bill had closure invoked, electricity prices in this province have slowly been on a volatile rise. Now, were the consumers of Alberta well served by that act of closure? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands with the tablings earlier and the outrage that was expressed by Albertans over their electricity bills would indicate to this member: no.

Now, the Alberta retail natural gas market is currently in a state between a fully regulated utility operation and competitive retail service. After the money that has been spent on energy deregulation in this province, the money that has been spent on the increase in natural gas prices and the bills, how can we say that over seven hours of debate or five hours of debate in committee is adequate? This is a complex piece of legislation. When one comments that the opposition has had the opportunity and they have not gone through this line by line, well, I have looked in *Hansard*, and those government members that have spoken certainly have not gone through the bill at committee stage line by line.

When we see double-digit price increases for natural gas in this province, this closure motion indicates to me just how far out of touch the government is with the consumers. Are not the consumers in the constituencies of Edmonton-Calder, Drayton Valley-Calmar, Redwater, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, Calgary-Shaw, Calgary-Bow expressing their concern about natural gas prices and how they're affecting residential and commercial users in this province? I've heard in the last few weeks in this Assembly concern from all sides of the House.

To think that we are going to have a bill that is going to amend the Gas Distribution Act, the Rural Utilities Act, and the Gas Utilities Act all in one sweep yet we are lining this bill up with another bill that's going to have closure on it, Bill 3, so that we can have convergence of the electricity and the natural gas markets – this government wants to push it through the Assembly.

The amendments were certainly on the web site, the draft amendments for this legislation. I believe there were even draft regulations on Alberta Energy's web site, but that is not part of the debate of this Legislative Assembly. After the final draft was placed before this Assembly, all hon. members should have had the opportunity to stand in this Assembly and debate the merits or the negative aspects of this bill, and this has not been provided . . . [Mr. MacDonald's speaking time expired]

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 15 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:09 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

For the motion:

Abbott	Haley	McClelland
Boutilier	Hancock	Rathgeber
Broda	Herard	Renner
Calahasen	Hutton	Snelgrove
Cardinal	Jonson	Stelmach
Coutts	Klapstein	Strang
Danyluk	Lord	Tannas
Forsyth	Lougheed	Tarchuk
Friedel	Mar	Taylor
Fritz	Maskell	VanderBurg
Gordon	Masyk	Vandermeer
Graydon	McClellan	Woloshyn
Griffiths		

3:20

Against the motion:

Blakeman	MacDonald	Nicol
Bonner	Mason	Taft
Carlson	Massey	
Totals:	For – 37	Against – 8

[Government Motion 15 carried]

head: **Government Bills and Orders**

head: Committee of the Whole

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 19

Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2003

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In the time allocated, which is certainly not enough time to debate this billion-dollar issue – this is going to be a billion-dollar bill for Albertans in the future – I would urge any members on the government side that wish to participate in the debate certainly to do so because Albertans will be interested in reviewing this record if natural gas bills continue to be as confusing as electricity bills currently are.

Now, when we talk about providing choice to citizens with natural gas delivery and that this choice is going to drive down costs, I have yet to be convinced of this. When I go through the bill, I see many, many things that need improvement. There are many ways to improve this bill, but still I don't think we can improve it enough that it is going to be a positive influence on Alberta consumers and is going to drive down prices in this province. It has yet to be explained to me how giving consumers more choice in signing a contract, whether it's for three or five years or even for one year or floating through on this natural gas spot price to receive natural gas for residential heating, is going to improve the lot of Albertans. With Bill 3, the sister of Bill 19, we have quite an extensive time for a market surveillance administrator.

One only has to look at, of all things, the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta's policy convention booklet from 2002. This was a policy convention that took place November 15 and 16 at the Coast Plaza Hotel and conference centre.

Mr. Rathgeber: Were you there?

Mr. MacDonald: No, I was not there, but certainly I was delighted to receive a copy of the policy conference workbook.

In that workbook it's surprising how many good policies of this Conservative Party don't make it to this Legislative Assembly floor. This is one of them, and I think it's yet another example of imitation being a fine form of flattery. First, we see the stabilization fund being adopted. This is an opportunity for the government to take a fairly sound policy from the policy convention, and if we're going to take a bad law and make it a little better, well, let's do this.

In discussions there there was an effort made to establish a special watchdog committee to monitor. To monitor. Now, there are many Conservatives that are very good at monitoring the situation, and here is another example where the Conservatives want to monitor, but this committee should monitor the rural utility systems. The committee should have on it the Minister of Energy, municipally elected representatives, and energy and industry participants and clients. The clients would include the consumers, Mr. Chairman. This idea would be called price protection for rural utility systems. What a great idea to have price protection for natural gas consumers.

I was going through this legislation and going through Bill 3, and there was such a deal in Bill 3 made over the market surveillance administrator, but in Bill 19, the Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2003, that was to my surprise not there. So at this time, Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit to the Assembly – and it's in order from the Parliamentary Counsel – an amendment to the Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act. I'm going to get one of the pages, please, to take this to the Chairman of the Committee of the Whole.

For the record I believe we will call this amendment A1, and as it's been circulated to all hon. members of this Assembly, I will read

the proposed amendment into the record: the hon. member to move that Bill 19 be amended in section 2(2) by adding the following after the proposed section 28.8:

Market Surveillance Administrator

28.9 (1) The Minister of Energy must appoint an individual to serve as the Market Surveillance Administrator who shall monitor and investigate the supply, distribution, and sale of natural gas from the distributor to the consumer.

(2) The Market Surveillance Administrator shall report to the Minister of Energy on matters in subsection (1) annually.

Now, I think this amendment A1 is reasonable, and I'm not going to in the short time allowed . . . It's reasonable because it's going to provide the same sort of protection that electricity consumers can get. I don't know what to say other than to urge the hon. members of the government – certainly, they must be aware of the price protection for rural utility systems, which was discussed at the convention last November, and it's certainly an issue that I have brought forward. I have had correspondence with the hon. Minister of Government Services, and I really wasn't satisfied with the response and the speed of the response from the department, but I think that it is very, very important. I have to say that I'm disappointed that we're going to have this so-called flow-through rate, and we're going to have these wild swings in prices.

3:30

In conclusion in regard to amendment A1, I would urge all members to consider that the EUB at one time thought that the Natural Gas Price Protection Act would allow some form of consumer protection. Now, if one looks at decision 2001-75, one can see where the board thought that the Natural Gas Price Protection Act would work in that manner, and when the board considers that given the provisions of the Natural Gas Price Protection Act some customers such as AltaGas would be sufficiently protected, the board thought that, well, if the Natural Gas Price Protection Act is that good, then there's no need to consider the hedging provisions that AltaGas had proposed to be necessary to soften up some of the price spikes for consumers.

Now, I'm sure there's going to be an hon. member of this Assembly standing up to say: we don't need the market surveillance administrator. There will be an hon. member from the government standing up to say: we don't need this because the board is going to take care of everything. Well, the board in that decision thought that the Natural Gas Price Protection Act was going to do the job, and we all know that that act . . .

Mr. Mason: It's useless.

Mr. MacDonald: I don't know when it's going to work. I heard a comment that it was useless, but I don't know when that Natural Gas Price Protection Act is ever going to kick in, and consumers across this province, to say the least, are resentful. They consider that Natural Gas Price Protection Act to be a broken promise. However, in regard to Bill 19 and the proposal that we have a market surveillance administrator, I would like all hon. members to consider this, and when you consider the manipulation of price that has been alleged at the Power Pool – it has been proven on two occasions, but no names have been released to the public, which disappoints me, Mr. Chairman – and when we see all these marketers coming in to supply retail service to customers for natural gas, the market surveillance administrator is needed. It certainly is needed, and I would urge all members of this Assembly to support this amendment, and this is the first of many amendments that I have in regard to this bill.

Now, when we consider this, Mr. Chairman, we have to think of

what's best for natural gas consumers in this province. They will need a market surveillance administrator to ensure that their interests in what is, in my view, flawed legislation have to be protected by someone.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. McClelland: Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. My friend from Edmonton-Gold Bar issued an invitation for members of the government or members opposite to him to participate in this debate and to speak specifically to the amendment that is before us. I'm glad that I was admonished to speak specifically to the amendment that is before us because it may have been a 'circuitous' . . . a roundabout route for me to get from it and to it.

An Hon. Member: Circuitous.

Mr. McClelland: Yes. You see, I can't even get the word out because I have so much difficulty with this amendment.

Now, the amendment of course speaks to the act that's before the House, the Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2003. This act was brought to the House to facilitate, as members have said, competition in the marketplace. So what is this competition going to do, and why should we think that this competition is going to change anything? Why should we have any particular confidence in the capacity of the free market in essentially a deregulated gas energy market to provide value? I think that we should, Mr. Chairman, and we should . . . [interjection] Oh, I see. Okay. Thank you. I wasn't sure quite what the hand signal was, Mr. Chairman, and I was a little nervous because I know it's been a while since I got to the amendment.

An Hon. Member: I'll give you a hand signal you can understand.

Mr. McClelland: The member opposite suggests that he has a hand signal that I could understand very readily, and I'm sure that I could. Thumbs up would be the signal that I'm on the right track.

Well, the legislation that the amendment speaks to is legislation that brings competition to the marketplace, and that competition in the marketplace may provide innovation, which will in fact provide better value to the customers being served, and that's really what we have to look to. The commodity of natural gas has a finite value. We've all discussed this in the Chamber in the many hours of debate that this bill has been before the House, the endless debate, and we have come to understand that natural gas has a value, and we have come to understand that our planet is best served if natural gas is used with a mind to the finite limit of that resource and its actual value. If we use our resources based upon what their real value is, well, innovation comes into play, conservation, that I know members opposite, the Liberals and the New Democrats, would surely feel comfort with, and the efficient use of the resource.

Imagine, had we not considered a finite resource based upon its value to society, would we waste or would we not waste that resource if we had it for nothing? We're driven because we're human beings to make more efficient use based upon the price that we pay for a commodity. So although the prices have been high relative to what we used to pay for it, the price relative to its value to our economy and to the North American economy is not particularly high and is forcing us to innovate and to use the resource wisely.

Now, over the course of recent months the price has been high. It's spiked up. But it's spiked up in recent months because of world

geopolitical events, because we had a cold winter. But I would remind members opposite in the House and those listening that natural gas was at a three-year low this summer and that the price of natural gas is falling like a stone. I heard that on the radio this morning, that the price of natural gas is going down because it is a commodity that has a value that does go up and down, and that's why many of us have determined that it's in our interests to have predictability to buy a contract so that we know what we'll be paying for our natural gas energy from month to month for a period of years, similar to, perhaps, getting a long-term mortgage when we buy a house.

3:40

Yes, it has caused us to have to change how we think of natural gas as a commodity and, yes, it has been difficult for many people in the transition, and yes, it has been particularly difficult for people in a situation of low or fixed income without the capacity within their budgets to move resources around. Having heard that very valid concern, the government made the very appropriate and correct decision to do what was necessary to protect those in need, and certainly it would've been nice to be able to protect those in want, but that's just not a true reflection of life. We as individual citizens and as a government responsible for the fiduciary responsibility to be careful custodians, to be careful of what we do with the public purse and taxpayers' money and the resources that belong to everyone, have to make the tough decisions.

I know that it's opposition's role to say that everything we do is wrong and that we should do this and we should do that because that's the role of opposition, but I know the opposition members here present, being good and reasonable people, understand that behind the rhetoric, were the positions reversed, they would do the same thing because it makes sense. I see a member opposite gasping because finally someone said what was in their heart, and they couldn't say it.

So let's just look at what has been achieved as a direct result of a free enterprise approach to energy, and keep in mind that natural gas generates much of the electricity that we use, and therefore the cost of electricity is affected by the cost of natural gas.

Mr. MacDonald: Are we going to put this in your brochure in the next election?

Mr. McClelland: Yes. The member opposite says, "Are we going to put this in your brochure in the next election?" I hope and pray that the Liberals do because Albertans understand the innate sense of the words that I'm speaking.

Albertans are not people that can't see beyond the surface. That's why there are 74 of us in this House even as we speak: because Albertans understand and appreciate the free market and have faith and confidence in the free market.

We have 700 years of coal in our province.

Rev. Abbott: Eight hundred.

Mr. McClelland: "Eight hundred," I hear a member say. But we don't have very much hydroelectric energy. Other provinces have a vast hydroelectric potential and resource, very inexpensive to produce, very clean, and we need to compete with those provinces for our economy. We need to get to a clean coal, perhaps a gasification economy based on that 800-year, perhaps even more, inventory of coal potential.

I see the Member for Edmonton-Riverview is resting his head on his desk. Hopefully these words are not putting him to sleep.

Hopefully these words are encouraging the member to a more free enterprise and a more confident vision of the future.

What we need is to evolve to an economy that's based on hydrogen, on research and development. We need to evolve to an economy that makes better use of green power. The deregulation of the energy industry, including natural gas, has led directly to the capacity of the government of Alberta to be a leader in the country in the use of green power. Now, had we not embraced – and when I say we, I say Albertans, not just the government as represented by people in this Chamber today, but we as Albertans, Albertans as individual citizens and Albertans as business owners, large and small. Had we not the confidence to embrace the free market system, it would not have been possible for others to come into the market to bring their resources, their innovations, their skills, their commitment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar is rising on a point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, please. *Beauchesne* 459(1), relevance. Amendment A1 was specific to the market surveillance administrator, nothing to do with coal generation.

Mr. McClelland: Mr. Chair, I'll save the chair the difficulty of having to go through various references to cross-check the reference of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, and I stand suitably admonished for straying from the amendment, which had to do with the market administrator and the amendment here.

Debate Continued

Mr. McClelland: Now, it's clear, my friends, that were a market administrator as devised by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to be a part of this debate, that very individual would say: "Right on. What you're saying is absolutely correct and should have been said long ago." He or she, the market administrator, would probably say: I cannot understand the reluctance of the Liberals and the New Democrats to embrace legislation which would provide for a more competitive market, which would provide for innovation, which would provide for the use of green power, which would ensure that the future citizens – our children, our grandchildren, and their grandchildren – would have energy supplies at the flick of a switch, unlike other jurisdictions in our country and in the world who on the flick of the switch get disappointment because of yet another brownout, because there has not been the innovation or the investment in the energy sector, who when they open the mail and get their tax bill have disappointment because they know that they are going to be paying the price for public investment and investment and investment and lower power bills because they're paying higher taxes to offset the public investment in generation of power.

So, my friends, we have a bill before us which provides for the citizens of Alberta to have a market-driven energy industry using natural gas, evolving into coal hopefully, hydrogen, using green energy, using wind power, and the generation of energy from waste materials, technology that the world will come knocking at our door to purchase, providing jobs and a future for every Albertan, every child, every grandchild, and the thousands of people that move to our province every year for just those opportunities.

So I thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for inviting this member, this Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, to participate in this debate and try once again to put the opposition on the right course.

The Chair: The next speaker is Edmonton-Highlands, followed by Wainwright, followed by Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

3:50

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Well, I'll be glad to share the time with hon. members who wish to speak, so I will be relatively brief. However, you know, I must say in passing that once we have only an hour to go on the debate for the entire bill as well as any amendments and so on, it is interesting that members of the government are quite a bit more willing to jump up and speak for extended periods of time, and it leaves me wishing that we could in some way impose closure within the hour. Just for the record, that was a joke – that was a joke – and it better not appear in any Tory pamphlets in the next election.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford talks about the advantages that are brought about as a result of the government bill, one of them being about how high gas prices bring innovation and make the best use and encourage conservation. But if we come to how the high prices have been arrived at, I think it tells a different story, Mr. Chairman. The primary reason for high prices for natural gas right now is that enormous quantities of this gas are being exported to the United States for them to use and for them to use to create jobs in their economy at our expense. So this is hardly conservation. It's conservation by wholesale export of a diminishing and valuable natural resource. I just needed to say that.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to indicate that I regretfully cannot support the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar's amendment to add a market surveillance administrator to the Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2003. I know that this is a provision that's included in the electricity act that we're also debating, Bill 3, but this implies acceptance of the government's approach to deregulation of natural gas, that there would be a market and somebody's got to keep an eye on the market and so on. Quite frankly, the New Democrat view is that we don't need a market surveillance administrator; we need a regulated price for natural gas. Since it is our natural gas, then the needs of Albertans should be met first, and the entire structure that is being developed in Bill 19 will add enormously to the cost. The administrative structures will add a layer of costs as well, and that is not in the interests of Albertans as we see it. So we do not support Bill 19, and we cannot support this particular amendment since it merely reinforces the government's approach to deregulation in the gas industry.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The amendment that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has presented is an interesting one.

Mr. Rathgeber: That's one way of describing it.

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. It is one way of describing it.

He drew the comparison between Alberta's deregulated electricity market and the market surveillance administrator as proposed. I think it's important to point out to that member some of his misinformation or his lack of understanding of the situation as regards comparison between electricity and gas. Mr. Chairman, the wholesale electricity markets have only been deregulated for several years, and the whole market itself is continuing to develop. The primary function of the proposed market surveillance administrator in electricity is to monitor the competitiveness of Alberta's emerging

wholesale electricity market to make sure that consumers get a fair price, that they're treated fairly, and that there is competition.

The difference between the electricity market and the gas market, Mr. Chairman, is that the natural gas market has been deregulated in Alberta for 17 years. It's a very well-developed wholesale natural gas market. It is extremely competitive, and it's highly integrated into a broader North American market. Any examination of the competitiveness of the wholesale natural gas market would need to occur on an interjurisdictional level. This of course would be beyond the scope of any market surveillance administrator that would be set up in Alberta. So I guess if I have a question to the member, it's: how could you justify creating a market surveillance administrator that could only function in Alberta, would be limited, couldn't deal with competition across the entire North American natural gas market? I don't understand it. It seems to me a waste of money and expense: taxpayers' money, taxpayers' expense.

At the same time, Mr. Chairman, I think it also has to be pointed out to the hon. member that Alberta Government Services responsibly oversees consumer protection relating to natural gas and electricity retailers and takes that responsibility very seriously. They do an excellent job at it. They will be monitoring the market prices very carefully. As well, the EUB is responsible for setting regulated transmission and distribution rates and regulated rates for gas and electricity. We have two bodies already created to monitor the system and make sure it works effectively. The board reviews metering and billing. It looks at residential, commercial, and small commercial consumers, and it's done so for years.

Bill 19 the way it's set up now will give the EUB additional authority to – I've written them down, and I'm going to list them – regulate companies other than utilities that would now be able to provide natural gas at regulated rates to consumers; increase fines for noncompliance with an EUB order; enable the EUB to enforce service quality standards and enforce a code of conduct which will govern the relationship between utilities, default supply providers, and retail affiliates.

Now, Mr. Chairman, in summary, if we started looking at examining the competitiveness of the wholesale natural gas market, we'd have to look at it in an interjurisdictional manner, which an Alberta market surveillance administrator could not do. We already have two bodies that effectively regulate or watch the market, and I guess my question to the member is: given that these two bodies already do this and given that it wouldn't have any effect interjurisdictionally, would the member consider admitting that this would just be duplication and a waste of taxpayers' money and remove his amendment?

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. A few comments, partly in response to the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I'd just like to point out to him, although he led the whole debate astray by drawing in the electricity industry, that before there was deregulation in electricity, the most reliable electricity in the world was in Canada. Edmonton Power, which was publicly owned in a regulated system, had virtually the top reliability in the most reliable country of the world. It also had far cheaper rates than we've got now. So correct your facts. Correct your facts.

Now, on this particular amendment I hear from government members repeated rejection of the notion of a market surveillance administrator. All we're trying to do here is keep you consistent. Bill 19 is aimed at drawing the gas network closer to the electricity system, and the electricity system integrated continentally has a

market surveillance administrator. So given that the government members are rejecting this notion for Bill 19, I'm wondering if they will be accepting an amendment to pull that function out of Bill 3. Would they be quite pleased to do that? I'd like their response. Are we going to chuck the electricity market surveillance administrator too? I think the public is deeply and justifiably concerned about price manipulation. I know for a fact that they want consumer protection. They don't know where to turn, and this is one chance to offer them a bone, at least to offer the consumer here a little bone while the big dogs of commerce eat up the rest of the dinner. Why don't we give the consumer a little bone?

4:00

I don't know how many of you have ever been to Bulgaria. I know I haven't, but there is a saying from Bulgaria: dry pants catch no fish. What we see here is a government that's committed to dry pants. We want the government to wade into this situation, get their pants wet, and catch a few fish, at least be on the prowl for some fish in case those fish are sharks out there cruising for innocent consumers.

So I'd encourage the government to accept its responsibility to protect consumers, accept this amendment to Bill 19. It will be a better bill because of it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster on amendment A1.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you. To talk to the amendment and just some of the subtle differences between a gas market regulator and an electrical market regulator, they are utilities, granted, but they are produced in very, very different methods. The ability to store electricity is nonexistent, so to regulate what is produced at power stations mostly like we have in Alberta, it's very critical that the balance between production and consumption be as closely tied as it can be because electricity that is not used is gone. Now, natural gas, on the hand, can be produced through the entire year. It can be put into storage caverns, and when you shut the switch off at your house, it stays in the gas line. It's not a commodity that just disappears. So to have the same surveillance on top of these things – we're not dealing with apples and oranges here.

Let's get a little bit more into what you mean about having an individual. According to your motion, "The Minister of Energy must appoint an individual." Well, with this bill he's done a lot better than that. He has 900,000 individuals monitoring the price of gas. And they won't report to the minister; they'll report to the company that's selling them that service. So rather than having someone watching out for people that purchase their own groceries, their own cable TV, their own telephone, that are completely capable of getting their own mortgage, buying their own vehicles, buying their insurance, buying all the commodities that are necessary in our life without the minister appointing someone to watch their business affairs, they're going to be able to do this by themselves.

Now, a really good example would be a gentleman from my community named Mr. Jim Davidson, who purchased a contract from, believe it or not, EPCOR three years ago for \$3.90. Now, at the time he was paying a little bit more than it was, but he stepped out on his own and bought a long-term contract with EPCOR, that right now is saving him a lot of money. He did that without anybody's help. He did it as a purchase of a commodity in the marketplace. Now, Jim isn't special. Jim has worked all his life. He's just an average, normal Albertan who on his own purchased a long-term requirement that he thought for his life and his situation was the best

thing he could do. In hindsight, which we're all very good at going to here, it was a very good move. But he did that.

Now, he couldn't have done that 10 years ago. He had to deal with ATCO, no ands, ifs, or buts. So now he had the opportunity to shop around, and he saved himself probably several hundred dollars a month. Giving customers a choice shouldn't have to be monitored by anybody. Hopefully, as time goes on and people become more aware of the electrical market and more suppliers are there, we will be able to back away from that individual who will have to monitor the electrical utilities, and the marketplace will begin to work as markets do when government gets out of the way.

We seem to think that somehow competition is new. I mean, it's a fact that natural gas customers, commercial people, have been able to have choice for over a decade, large customers since 1988, since the '70s in some cases. So why was it all right for the big boys to be able to buy at a right price and not the little guys, not the residential people, not the real people that it affects? We wouldn't allow that before, but things have changed.

So with this system we have in place, with this new process people talk to their neighbours. They see it on the news. The opposition makes a point of letting everyone know what all the bad options are out there and what good options they should do. People will use their good information and their diligence to make a decision about who they're going to buy their natural gas from, and trust me, they will be comparing with their neighbour in the coffee shop what price they pay, what other benefits they may have got.

Just take a step back to the deregulation of the phone rates. Ten years ago who was phoning you and saying: do you want to buy from Sprint? Nobody. Because it wasn't possible. They've actually become a bit of a pain now because they all want you to use their phones. Yet in the regulated monopoly part that Telus still has, they don't even have to provide service to people in my area for up to three years after they've built their house, and there is no one else allowed in there to do it. Now, that's blatantly unfair to parts of Alberta, but there's where you leave the regulated monopoly in place. They don't have to care. They don't have to worry about competition. They have the worst of all controls; the monitor is the federal government, probably the last fox you want to put in charge of the chicken house, probably the last one.

The thing we have to remember: I think many Albertans are under the impression that they're going to have to make a choice pretty soon, that they're going to have to do something, and maybe they're counting on the good graces of companies now, but they don't have to do anything. If you're perfectly happy with the service and the price you're getting from your natural gas provider, you could just simply stay there and get your bills, and they will provide that natural gas to you under the same governing body that they do right now. Now, I would think that some people that are more conservative, to use a phrase that's kind of popular in Alberta, may say: "I want to wait and see how this goes. I don't want to make that decision right now, so I'm going to watch. I'm going to talk to my neighbour on this side; I'll talk to my cousin down in Red Deer. I want to find out what they're doing." Believe me. When a marketer starts to provide better prices, better service, maybe a better monthly package, they'll get it. I mean, that's the way business works.

You know, most utility companies have let Albertans average their price along. Now, they didn't average the price of gas; they averaged the payment. And that was easy to understand: well, if I pay a hundred dollars a month, that's kind of like averaging out the price of gas from \$7 to \$2. Averaging is much easier for many, many people's household budgets. I know it certainly is for mine. So we've had that ability to understand that we can put a little bit of long-term stability into our household utility bill, and that benefits probably most people, most people that make what we make in here

and much more for people that make less. No one had to monitor that offer from the utility companies to say: "Do you want to pay a hundred dollars a month? Do you want to go from \$300 in the winter to \$20 in the summer?" They did that if it suited their situation. And this – what do I call you? Chairman? Speaker?

The Chair: Chairman.

Mr. Mason: That shows how much you speak.

4:10

Mr. Snelgrove: Yeah. You see, it's because we listen over here.

Mr. Chairman, there's another part of it that the regulatory body needs to make sure will be fair. The rural gas co-ops, now, are in a very different situation than a public utility in a city in that they have a closed group of owners. The only specific clause is to provide that utility gas service to them, and it will be difficult if one or two of those people in there decide they would like to be serviced by a new provider, who for some reason got gas cheap to them. We've recognized that in this legislation, and rather than have a monitor do that, we've let them decide. If the gas co-op says, "We're not playing. We voted. Our people want us to be the sole purchaser of gas, and the delivery will remain exactly like it is. We're going to buy it on the spot market or however they've done in the past," they'll be able to do that. But, you know, if the people in there say, "Let's open this up; let's, you know, get our fees for the delivery of it within, but let's let whoever wants to buy it," that's great.

I have an unfailing faith in human nature that those who have the general good of their neighbours will take charge and will help them, and they'll become informed, as most small rural communities and gas co-ops do. I mean, you don't have everyone be the expert on gas purchase or the cost of your distribution system upkeep or the equipment replacement, all the things that come into running a distribution system.

Now, there are many other things, if you were to have a market surveillance administrator, that he would have to deal with. Now, I mean, it would be one thing if he simply said: well, the price is too high, or the price is too low. But utilities don't set that price. The world market sets that price, and they take it. They either purchase from someone who's a producer on a long-term contract, that may give them a lower price than the spot and slightly higher than low spot prices – this amendment and this bill have nothing to do with the actual price of natural gas. It has to do with putting the stability into the delivery of it to you, to the consumer.

As part of the natural gas bill you have your basic charge for the gas; you've got rate riders, that might be there for maybe a pipeline or for some price that was up or down; your variable delivery charge, which could be on someone who uses huge amounts occasionally and not much; your fixed delivery charge, which is paying for the basic infrastructure; you have your municipal franchise tax, which many municipalities use as kind of a cash cow and may be not as appropriate as it should be; you have your meter reading, which is becoming more and more automated and more and more distant. I mean, many of our houses now and many of our businesses are read from the office in Edmonton over the phone lines, especially the big industrial users. So that price comes down too, but you don't need anyone monitoring that because business is able to look at the bills and say: can't afford to have the guy driving out every month or every two months; I want to go on the remote reading. Then, of course, the favourite son of all costs on it: the goods and services tax. I would agree with the hon. member who brought this forward, that part should be monitored by somebody, because that's really a cruel . . .

An Hon. Member: What part?

Mr. Snelgrove: The GST. It's just kind of a cruel trick they played on utilities.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think we have to take mainly under advisement that natural gas is different from electricity. It can be stored. It can be spot purchased at lower prices and stored; electricity cannot. So I think that in all fairness and with the good intentions of the hon. member we have to advise him that this is probably not a wise expenditure of money to include another level of bureaucracy in a place where it's probably not needed.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I shall take my seat and thank the hon. member for his encouragement to partake in today's discussion.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I rise again to debate amendment A1 on Bill 19. Certainly, I'm pleased to see that the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, recognizes that electricity is an essential service because electricity is a product that cannot be stored. I'm pleased to hear that. Electricity is not a commodity. Another correction to the hon. member is that we do not have a world market for natural gas. We have tied ourselves to the North American market. Now, if we were to look at the world market and we were to look at, say, natural gas liquids or natural gas coming from the southern part of Argentina, there would be a significant price difference, and the gas co-ops in the hon. member's constituency would be envious of the price that the Argentinians pay for domestic gas. So to say that there is a world market is, to say the least, inaccurate.

Certainly, the hon. member said earlier as to previous speakers that: well, this is not needed. And then the hon. member said: oh, but we care and we listen. Well, the PC Party in Alberta, which some would consider to be a regulated monopoly – the policy chairperson, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Bill Almdal put together this resolution package and is calling for price protection for rural utility systems. If it's good enough for the policy committee of the Progressive Conservative Party, I don't know why it's not good enough for government members. They recognize a need for this.

I think it's a contradiction, in conclusion, to have a market surveillance administrator for electricity customers and then to just leave out the natural gas customers.

Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: There are only two members standing. You need three, hon. member.

Mr. MacDonald: No. I don't want a standing vote, please, with the limited time we have left.

The Chair: All right. Sorry. Do you care to speak on the bill itself?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In the amount of time we had to discuss this very important issue – the 60 minutes is a guillotine on democracy. A standing vote, as much as I would like, would probably take up the last remaining bit of time that we have to discuss this important issue and how we're going to deal with the gas retail marketplace.

Now, I'm disappointed, to say the least, that amendment A1 did not pass, but certainly there are other concerns that have been expressed through this hon. member. One of them in regard to natural gas – and this government has been negligent in dealing with it in this bill, and at this time I would like to – is the natural gas quality in Alberta. The Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops has a lot

to say, and they have a lot of concerns, particularly for those customers in southeastern Alberta. Our correspondence with the Federation of Alberta Gas Co-ops, Mr. Chairman, indicates that Alberta is one of the only jurisdictions in North America that has no criteria for supply basin gas quality. In Alberta we have always been at the whim of the tariff approved by the regulator, which does not imply or guarantee gas quality.

The solution according to the fine people over at the Federation of Gas Co-ops is to implement an inner Alberta delivery specification on natural gas that ensures that connecting operators such as the federation members are protected from plant upsets and in turn can pursue remedial action and costs when a plant upset occurs. One example is that currently in Alberta the large transportation utility tariff states that 16 parts per million of hydrogen sulphide is allowed in natural gas while Occupational Health and Safety has set safe exposure limits of 10 parts per million. So that's a difference of six parts per million. The inherent risk of this commodity can be minimized by preventive legislation.

4:20

They go on to say that a process was attempted through a negotiated settlement with producers and transporters in the province. As far as I know, to-date that process, Mr. Chairman, has failed. Now, I don't know what sort of discussions have gone on in the meantime, but I did not find any part of this bill that is going to protect the safety and integrity of our natural gas pipeline systems in the province as well as the consumers that they serve. Again, I'm disappointed.

I know this legislation wasn't drafted in haste, Mr. Chairman. Certainly, as was discussed here earlier, there have been draft copies of this on the Internet since last October, and even some of the draft regulations were on the Department of Energy web site, but no mention of this. If we cannot pass a law that is going to protect not only the delivery system but the consumer at the end of it, then I think we should have another look at this bill.

I'm sad to think that in light of these important issues and other issues this Assembly is not going to get a chance to debate Bill 19 in this nature. Certainly, it's a first that this hon. member has heard from the hon. Member for Wainwright, the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster in relation to this issue. This issue is of great importance to the rural gas co-ops, and I don't know – in their remarks they didn't explain how many rural gas co-ops they had.

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, but pursuant to Government Motion 15, agreed to March 20, 2003, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 19, Gas Utilities Statutes Amendment Act, 2003, in Committee of the Whole, I must put the following question: on the clauses of the bill are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed?

Some Hon. Members: No.

The Chair: Carried.

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:23 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Mr. Tannas in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Haley	O'Neill
Broda	Hancock	Rathgeber
Calahasen	Hutton	Renner
Cardinal	Jonson	Snelgrove
Coutts	Klapstein	Stelmach
Danyluk	Lougheed	Strang
Forsyth	Mar	Tarchuk
Friedel	Maskell	Taylor
Fritz	Masyk	VanderBurg
Gordon	McClellan	Vandermeer
Graydon	McClelland	Woloshyn
Griffiths		

Against the motion:

Bonner	Mason	Taft
MacDonald		

Totals:	For – 34	Against – 4
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[The clauses of Bill 19 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed?

Some Hon. Members: Opposed.

The Chair: Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move that the committee rise and report Bill 19.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Lougheed: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration and reports Bill 19. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in this report?

Some Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed?

Some Hon. Members: Opposed.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to the agreement arrived at between House leaders earlier I would move that we do call it 5:30 and adjourn until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

[Motion carried; at 4:37 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]